TELOS

Number 94 Winter 1992-93

Special Issue on Traditions

Symposium on David Gross' **The Past in Ruins**

Contributions by:
David Gross
Tim Luke
Sang-ki Kim
Deborah Cook
Robert D'Amico
John Michael
Russell Jacoby
Theodor W. Adorno
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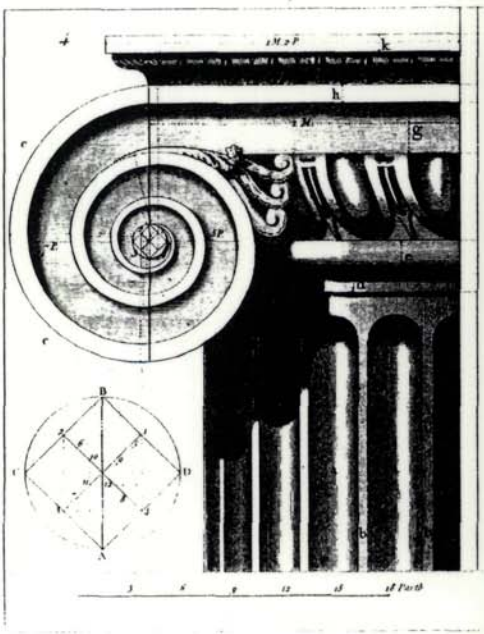
Paul Piccone



Special Section on the Former Czechoslovakia

Peter Rutland, Caroline Bayard, Karel Kosik, Joroslav Opat, Milan Znoj, Ivan Chvatik, Aviezer Tucker, Ernest Gellner

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Telos

A Quarterly Journal of Critical Thought

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Subscription Rates

One-year Individual . . . $32.00 One-year Institutional $80.00
Two-years Individual . . . $64.00 Two-years Institutional . . .$160.00
(Foreign Subscribers, including Canadians, add 15%)

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Back Issues available: ns. 13, 17-18 20-51, 53-93 at $9.50 each ($25.00 for institutions). Foreign orders, add 15%. All payments must be in U.S. currency. Out of print issues (ns. 1-12, 14-16, 19, 52) can be obtained in microform or facsimile through University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106, U.S.A.

Telos number 94 corresponds to Vol. 25, No. 4. ***Telos*** is published in the Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter by Telos Press Ltd., 431 E. 12th Street, New York, NY 10009. Second Class postage paid at New York and additional mailing offices. Postmaster please send address changes to:

Telos
431 E. 12th Street
New York, NY 10009 U.S.A.

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ISSN 0090-6514

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Introduction

Radical thought has always been ambivalent toward traditions. On the one hand, it could not avoid confronting them as inextricably embroiled in the legitimation of the *status quo* and, therefore, necessarily conservative. On the other, to be really radical, i.e., to go back to the roots, presupposed a need to regain a grounding presumably lost in a corrupt present. Whether it was a matter of digging up hidden roots or cutting off dead institutional branches the effort was contingent on the particular historical context. If traditions become so tied to entrenched corporatist interests as to prevent, e.g., the development of the free flow of goods and services under the pretense of "saving jobs" and the privileges of an internationally non-competitive new labor aristocracy or, as in the old days, the charging of interests for lending money on the ground that it is "immoral," they may be in need of revision. If, however, they have been eroded to the point that personal identity and community cohesion is threatened, then it may be warranted if possible — to try to strengthen, reconstitute or refunction them.

But even when a sharp rupture is unavoidable, traditions have a way of resurfacing in new guises. Hegel emphasized how the morning prayer had given way to the equally compulsive reading of the daily paper as a way to re-establish the individual's relation to God (or to the world), while Schmitt pointed out how miracles nowdays reappear as either revolution or "the state of exeption" — both representing equally radical breaks from normality. Far from restoring a *status quo ante*, however, this type of *Aufhebung* is what ultimately allows "the new" to displace "the old" and become institutionalized. Here is where instrumentalization by either the state or the market turns out to be limited. Traditions can be deployed to help sell cars as poorly disguised substitutes for sexual prowess, or to facilitate recruitment by the US Marines as a rite of passage to maturity, but only to the extent that they pretend to satisfy some fundamental need. Thus consumerism today still thrives on the claim to meet subjective needs for meaning, community, identity, etc. through the consumption of various commodities falsely advertised as adequate to the task. But to the extent that commodities can do so only partially, they leave these needs unmet and vulnerable to the allure of the next, equally inadequate commodity.

Clearly, today traditions are so eroded that they seem to pose no obstacle to anything. Their demise, however, may also have had something to do with

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the current social disintegration and widespread nihilism. This is why David Gross' book, *The Past in Ruins*, is an important contribution which, in this issue, is the subject of a lively symposium. It poses the question of the relation between traditions and modernity or, more broadly, the prospects of radical thought in a post-communist era potentially characterized by a generalized conformism. If liberalism is in crisis and the nation-state obsolete; if it is imperative to devise new forms of participatory politics and decentralized governance; if regionalism, communitarianism, populism and federalism are becoming increasingy attractive in the age of post-Fordism, then it is important to re-examine the role of traditions as the building blocs of community, individuality and meaning. The present symposium is only the beginning of a broader discussion which will be continued in forthcoming issues.

The second part of this issue is devoted to the former Czechoslovakia and its recent split. What most of the contributions seem to indicate is that the damage of "really existing socialism" to Czech intellectuals may be comparable to that inflicted on industry. All that seems to be coming out of the ashes of communism are sanctimonious calls for morality, the *agora*, the *polis* etc. — things that might have made sense in the struggle against authoritarianism but seem somewhat irrelevant in open societies where public debates are manipulated by a powerful media, intellectuals (at least in the US) are mothballed in universities wholly out of touch with social realities, and the old "totally administered society" flounders from crisis to crisis, seemingly unable to manage its way out of anything.

Yet despite all the disruptions resulting from the split, the Czech Republic is clearly the most successful of all former Soviet Bloc countries in recovering from the socio-economic insanities of "really existing socialism." What Peter Rutland has aptly called "Thatcherism Czech-style" seems to be working rather well. When Western Europe will eventually manage to work its way out of the present economic morass and start thinking seriously about a European unification unshackled by Brussels bureaucracies and the increasingly obsolescent nation-states, the Czech Republic will be ready to join as one of the reconstituted regional units better able to govern itself within a new continental framework.

Unable to shake socialist myths, Western intellectuals find these developments disconcerting. This should come as no surprise. As the self-appointed guardians of collective consciousness, their fate is inextricably connected with the state. The five-year plan is part of their being. A 21st century characterized by new forms of participatory politics, decentralization and post-Fordism may leave them in limbo. But this may be the price that needs to be paid to lift everyone else out of it.

Paul Piccone

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Symposium on The Past in Ruins

Rethinking Traditions

David Gross

One of my main concerns in *The Past in Ruins*[1] is the issue of tradition and how it ought to be dealt with today. My starting point is an obvious one: that we in the West now live so entirely within the framework of modernity that it is neither possible nor desirable to seek a return to pre-modernity. The triumph of what Baudelaire called *la vie moderne* has of course brought with it gains as well as losses, and certainly among the most notable of the losses has been the decline of tradition as a "value." Rather than being judged valuable, tradition is today more likely to be thought of as a liability. Any individual who makes the "mistake" of attaching himself to tradition fatally links himself to the fading world of the past at the very time when everyone else is becoming wedded to either the present or future. To be "traditional" now means to be obsolete, for according to the wisdom of the day successful living requires a disaffiliation from the oppressive patterns of earlier times. But if tradition is generally deemed irrelevant and relegated to the dustbin of history, then it is no longer able to provide, as it has done for millennia, the "glue" to bond together social life. The slipping away of tradition therefore creates a problem, for every polity needs some kind of social cement to avoid collapse into normlessness. Since the advent of modernity, this problem has been at least partially solved by the emergence of the modern state, consumer capitalism, and media culture as functional equivalents. That these three surrogates for tradition now supply most of what passes for social cement in the late 20th century *has itself* become one of the defining features of modernity.

Even so, the fact that tradition is no longer the binding force it once was does not mean that it has disappeared entirely. Many traditions have simply lost their integrative functions, but have not completely vanished. Some have found ways to survive in the interstices of society. Others have retreated from the public into the private sphere where they continue as family traditions. Still others have withdrawn to the margins of society, persisting relatively undisturbed in rural enclaves or urban subcultures. And finally, a few (e.g., religious

1. *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

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apocalyptic and clandestine revolutionary traditions) have survived by hiding not at the periphery of society but underground and out of sight. All of these are examples of how, even in this apparently traditionless age, some traditions have managed to endure.

In addition, there are two other ways that traditions have persisted unnoticed. One is as fragmentary residues. Sometimes when traditions that were once organic wholes disintegrate, their shattered pieces still survive but without any of the inner coherence they once possessed. In such cases, traditional residues linger on but completely detached from their original settings and hence noticeably out of place within modernity. (Examples of such surviving vestiges are various types of provincialisms, archaic forms of spirituality, superseded codes of honor, pre-capitalist modes of work and sharing, etc.) The other way that traditions or traditional fragments have persisted is through the manipulative efforts of the state and the economy. In some instances, the state has propped up certain long-standing traditions, but generally it does this only if or when such traditions are useful for political legitimation. In other cases, the state has proved equally adept at re-working pre-political traditions in such a manner as to preserve their form but alter their content (i.e., it refunctions them into "national" traditions). Similarly, the market has at times also refunctioned either wholes or parts of tradition, but always with an eye to their economic utility. Wherever traditions can be drawn on for their nostalgia value, the market has sought to keep them alive (albeit in distorted or reified form) in order to harness them to the profit motive.

One of the working assumptions of *The Past in Ruins* is that modernity, as *the irreversible phenomenon, needs to be thoroughly criticized. The best way* to do so is by means of an immanent critique, notwithstanding the shortcomings of such an approach. One objection raised against it is that it can only offer a modernist critique of modernity but is unable to look beyond the internal dynamics of the present to gain a broader perspective. An immanent critique disregards the critical possibilities of tradition, since from its perspective the traditional past contains little more than the debris of history — most of which is not worth retrieving because it has been *aufgehoben*. This dismissal of tradition is shortsighted because it overlooks the critical role that even "superseded" traditions can still play in modern life. In fact, the more a tradition becomes *passé*, the more it becomes something "other than" what is experienced as everyday life. In this respect, traditions, particularly defeated or marginalized ones, have become what traditions never were before: forms of alterity which, if approached correctly, can help challenge quotidian existence. By juxtaposing rather than integrating the past and the present, the nonsynchronous and the synchronous, it may become possible not only to see the present from an entirely new perspective but to raise questions about some of the otherwise hardly noticed clichés of contemporary life.

This does not mean we can or should return to eclipsed traditions as living practices. Nor does it mean that the reappropriation of tradition is in any

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way an alternative to an immanent critique of modernity. Rather, recourse to the residual otherness of tradition can complement an immanent critique. It can deepen immanent critique by drawing on a wealth of material that would normally fall outside its range. By tapping into this non-contemporaneous material and holding it up to the "normality" of the present, not only can we gain access to forgotten ways of being but the limitations of our own era can be seen from a uniquely *external* viewpoint.

These arguments inform only part of *The Past in Ruins*. They were developed prior to and apart from concerns with federalism, populism, and communitarianism that have recently come to the fore in *Telos* debates. Despite differences in focus, *The Past in Ruins* is relevant to these discussions, even though some of it seems to argue at cross purposes with a number of emerging *Telos* positions. To make both the agreements and disagreements between my perspective and that of *Telos* clearer, I want first to mention what I take to be our common starting point and then describe some of the differences that separate us. (Even though this terminology may please no one, I'll refer to the *Telos* position as "neo-populist" and to the articulators of this position "neo-populists.")

To begin with, the shared background that led me to write *The Past in Ruin* and the *Telos* neo-populists to launch a defense of federalism and communitarianism is the common legacy of Critical Theory. No matter how far many of us may think we have travelled from the original ideas of Critical Theory, its guiding assumptions still shape the way we apprehend the world and identify the problems we see there. For example, from the first issue of *Telos* in the late 1960s until today there has been a consistent attack on the forces of instrumentalization, homogenization, commodification, one-dimensionality, and identity logic. Over the years I have not only agreed with these critiques but have also agreed with *Telos*' vigorous defense of particularity and specificity as alternatives to those forces presently driving toward an anti-utopian "McWorld."

Similarly, both *Telos* neo-populists and I have laid great stress on the value of negativity — a position we initially acquired from immersion in Critical Theory (as well as Marxism and Hegelian philosophy). Negativity as a concept seemed important because it defined a stance in opposition to the false positivity of "the system." Yet when it came to determining who or what actually embodied negativity we ran into difficulties. The working class, for instance, turned out to be an illusory negativity. Likewise, the so-called New Class intellectuals — those who at first claimed to speak for particularity and specificity but then ended up becoming a new managerial class of experts and social technicians — also represented failed negativity. Even those of us who thought that art, philosophy or eros would somehow be able to express authentic forms of negativity have been disappointed. Nonetheless, *just because* effective negativity has proven elusive, many of us have continued to search high and low for it. In this respect, *The Past in Ruins* is, at least in part, an attempt to locate negativity in the otherness of tradition. The neo-populists, by contrast, have sought negativity in the *nomoi* of residual or reconstituted local communities. In their view, the diversity and

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heterogeneity still present in such communities is formidable enough to challenge the false positivity of what used to be called the Establishment.

Although this latter position has taken its inspiration from Critical Theory, it has also departed from it in significant ways. For one thing, it is hard to find any traces of a genuinely populist outlook among the major Critical Theorists in the 1930s or 1940s. The reason for this indifference to populism may simply be (or so the argument goes) that populism was profoundly misunderstood at that time and hence could not have been perceived as a possible source of negativity This may in fact have been the case, for up to roughly the mid-1970s populism was regarded as a statist, racist, xenophobic, anti-intellectual, irrational, and opportunistic movement, and consequently not a credible source of negativity. However, thanks to the work of Goodwyn, Lasch and others it is now possible to view the movement differently. It appears that there were a number of tendencies within at least American populism that were radical rather than conformist; among these were an emphasis on autonomy, egalitarianism, participatory democracy and local self-determination, a stress on the importance of political and moral accountability, and support for social heterogeneity (understood as "the spontaneous interaction of people in organic communities").

The neo-populists have accepted these revisionist views, and this has propelled them far beyond the outlook of the founding generation of Critical Theorists. Not surprisingly, it has also forced them to re-think one of the pivotal notions of original Critical Theory: namely, Marcuse's concept of one-dimensionality. The "system," the neo-populists now argue, is not as totalitarian as Marcuse described it and hence is not able to co-opt each and every challenge that emerges from within. On the contrary, power today has taken the opposite tack; it has learned it can sustain itself best not by eliminating difference but by manufacturing more difference ("artificial negativity") which it then projects outward as resistances to be overcome. On this view, the production of artificial negativity becomes an essential part of the regulatory mechanism of the system as a whole and also an ingenious way "to prevent involution and growing irrationality." In addition, so the neo-populists claim, there exist natural and legitimate forms of "organic negativity" (embodied, e.g., in authentic communities) and these can presumably be drawn upon to challenge the power of New Class intellectuals and their control of the state, market, and the media.

In a nutshell, a major thrust of the neo-populist argument seems to be as follows (I focus here only on the political, not the economic, side of the argument). (1) We need an alternative to the present administrative state run by a bureaucratic and technocratic intelligentsia. (2) Federalism is the best alternative, provided it is true federalism and not the kind which simply decks out in federalist garb all the features of the centralized nation-state). (3) In order to have true federalism, within any polity there must be an appropriate set of attitudes, including a willingness to participate in politics, a sense of responsibility, civic virtue, social trust, and a well-developed capacity for decentralized decision-making. (4) But because qualities such as these do not appear by accident, the prior

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conditions that produce them must exist, and that means that there must first be real, organic communities. Only such communities can engender autonomous (as opposed to state-dependent) personalities who in turn can initiate modes of civic involvement and communal responsibility that make a functioning democracy possible. (5) But, finally, for such organic communities to exist there must first be integrative traditions which provide some amount of social cement to bind them together as meaningful collectivities. Without significant cultural and social traditions, communities are not able to function, consequently they cannot provide the *point d'appui* from which all the above mentioned benefits might spring. To phrase it differently, traditions make viable communities possible, which then create autonomous individuals who in turn promote democratic values producing civic virtue and social trust, which make "really functioning" federalism possible, which finally provide a feasible alternative to the existing state run by New Class managers.

Admittedly, this brief summary oversimplifies the neo-populist position. Nevertheless, it should still be clear that, though the neo-populists and I may have taken different routes from a common starting point in Critical Theory, we have in the end both come back to the importance of tradition. This convergence of interest, though, is in some respects more apparent than real, for a glance at our respective positions makes it evident that we conceive of tradition differently and give it different roles to play. I see tradition's importance in terms of its shock value, particularly its ability to provoke contradictions and open up new ways of thinking about "what is" in light of "what was." The neo-populists, on the other hand, still view tradition as a potentially integrative force. To them, it has not yet exhausted its potential to bind together communal life and hence to provide the basic conditions for the emergence of autonomous individualities.

I have problems with this viewpoint. If I am right that most of our substantive traditions have been defeated, commodified, or instrumentalized (even though a few have also survived), how then are traditions going to provide the necessary bonding that would make authentic *Lebenswelten* possible in the first place? The neo-populists offer two answers. The first suggests that the alleged decline of tradition has been exaggerated and that supposedly eclipsed traditions are still latent. Presumably, by latent traditions are meant those that have survived as *Denkformen* (mental dispositions) rather than as actual patterns of behavior (which are normally what traditions are understood to be). The assumption here seems to be that what is latent can be made manifest simply by "nurturing" it back to life. It is as if certain traditions had merely fallen asleep and now need only to be reawakened in order to become again what they should be: living practices. The second answer is slightly different. It does not deny that traditions have been seriously eroded, but implies that they can be "reconstituted." In this case, it is not simply a matter of reactivating what is already there but of consciously reconstructing what has faded away.

My objection to the first answer is that it is not possible to breathe new life into old traditions and expect them to work in new circumstances. The lifeworlds

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within which substantive traditions were once housed have been so eviscerated that there is little hope that they can be created anew at this late point in time. To try to revive particular traditions without reviving the lifeworlds themselves (in my view, an impossibility) would make traditions artificial constructs and therefore extremely ineffective as integrative forces of communal life. My objection to the second answer is similar. Traditions cannot be reconstituted simply because they are needed for social purposes beyond themselves. That approach smacks of social engineering. Any tradition that presents itself as "reconstituted" is likely to be only symbolic and for this reason one that is highly susceptible to manipulation and misuse. It is precisely when traditions are converted into symbols or images that they run the risk of being commodified by the market or instrumentalized by the state. (This, by the way, is a danger that too many defenders of multiculturalism have failed to notice. A good number of the traditions they seek to reconstitute are not real but only media-created or media-transformed symbols of tradition.)

For these reasons, I am skeptical about at least this aspect of neo-populist thought. I do not believe that traditions can simply be reactivated or reconstructed at will, which is why the best approach to take toward tradition is the one I suggested above: critical appropriation. However, there is another aspect of neo-populist thought with which I do agree, and this is that we have another option so far not mentioned: we can encourage the development of *new traditions*. In my opinion, new traditions, not restored old ones, would be more likely to provide the organic negativity neo-populists seek. But the emergence and unfolding of new traditions take time. Authentic traditions can only come out of particular face-to-face relations. Once they have taken hold, they must be passed down from one generation to the next, since without this temporal transmission they cannot be considered legitimate. In this respect, it is hard to imagine that any meaningful tradition could establish itself in less than several decades.

Nevertheless, even if new *lebensweltliche* traditions did evolve organically out of specifically "modern" conditions, it is not inconceivable that they could fall into the hands of the state or market. As the neo-populists have convincingly argued, many of the current forms of artificial negativity no longer work very well. Theoretically, the state (again, to stay only with politics) could exhaust its capacity to produce the internal opposition it needs to legitimize itself. If this happened, the state would then need to resort to the real organic negativity of actual traditions to provide more convincing reasons for its interventionist strategies. Even new traditions, then, could play to the interests of the state. But it is equally possible that the opposite could happen. As new *nomoi*, traditions could just as easily challenge or subvert the logic of the given. At this point no one can presume to predict what critical effect new traditions might have, since obviously much would depend on the kinds of traditions that eventually emerged. But for those interested in exploring potential sources of social or cultural negativity, a rethinking of tradition in both its "old" and "new" forms is a project well worth pursuing.

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Neo-Populism: Fabricating the Future by Rehabbing the Past?

Tim Luke

In *The Past in Ruins*, David Gross reexamines standard accounts of the demise of tradition and the rise of modernity. Drawing on classical sociological theory and modern European history, he retraces the history of traditional society with its organic stability insured and guided by authoritative traditions, being swept aside by capitalist society with its standards enforced by the nation-state, consumer capitalism and the mass media: ". . . in 1650 the overall cultural framework of the West was traditional. . . . By contrast, in 1850 [it] had become modern. Though substantial pockets of tradition survived, they tended to be viewed through the lenses of modernity" (p. 42).

Such accounts of modernity are now regarded as definitive but, unlike other writers, Gross does not exaggerate the destruction of tradition. Indeed, he argues that traditions still survive beside, behind, between, or beneath modernity. It might be difficult to discover them, but they are alive and well at the center of society in religious, educational, political, and cultural institutions; in the periphery, in ethnic enclaves, rural areas or urban bohemias; in the interstices of society in family practices, kinship institutions or personal emotional ties; and underground, where religious sects, linguistic minorities, tribal groups, secret societies, and revolutionary political movements operate. Elsewhere, Gross argues, modernity prevails as capitalist exchange, statist managerialism and electronic imagery.

This claim, however, raises a red flag. If tradition "only" persists at the center, in the joints, on the margins, and deep underground, then where does it *not* survive? This openly pessimistic evaluation may be much more positive than Gross thinks. Even though he provides an epic portrayal of tradition defeated by modernity, it is clear that his account is open to challenges. On the one hand, Gross appeals to the appropriate evidence, calls many convincing witnesses, and provides a compelling case against modernity in favor of tradition. On the other, the initial bill of particulars, identifying the failures of tradition and flaws in modernity, seems suspect.

Past

Gross' account is wide-ranging and exhaustive. Yet it is precisely this breadth that calls it into question. Is *The Past in Ruins* truly persuasive or is it convincing

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because it rests at the heart of many modern critiques of society, economy, and the state? In other words, seeing the past (tradition) in ruins and the present (modernity) as its ruination has become virtually "traditional": it lives as a mode of thinking inherited from Rousseau, Marx, and Adorno. Because we often wish to stand (explicitly or implicitly) with these critics of all that exists, we refill their prescriptions by following the traditions of social theory once again. The basic story line of a *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* narrative survives in our various conceptual clans as a way of thinking about ourselves in our world. Unfortunately, in choosing to follow this script, Gross falls victim to an objectified vision of tradition, which is seen as "something" valuable passed on to posterity.

This reified interpretation of tradition begins with Gross' first definitions, but remains a problem throughout the book. To identify tradition, Gross goes back to the Latin verb *tradere*, which implies giving *something* up or over to another since Roman jurisprudence saw this practice as a bequest or inheritance. Hence, what tradition means is that "(A) something precious or valuable is (B) given to someone in trust after which (C) the person who receives the 'gift' is expected to keep it intact and unharmed out of a *sense of obligation* to the giver" (p. 9). These webs of obligation in giving and receiving "something" of value through successive generations, in turn, provide the cohesive bonds of authority that once gave life meaning. That is, "it told people what they should do in order to be in harmony with the world . . . it made clear that the authoritative was always that which was handed down from the past through the medium of tradition" (p. 10).

The thing-like quality assigned to tradition, however, often subjectifies a set of beliefs and practices that are always nothing more than a set of values and actions. Gross sees tradition as "something valuable," and it must, like a thing, be preserved in form and content to retain its value as it is passed on through at least three generations. The thing-like containers, which are traditions, therefore become definite vessels that also "carry" a certain amount of spiritual value or moral meaning. This cargo of moral, spiritual, cultural prestige creates a sense of continuity, "as if one were a link in a chain stretching back in time" (p. 10). Thus Gross tends to see the value-laden vessels of tradition as conveyances unloading their prestigious wares of spirituality or goods of morality at the advent of each new generation. In turn, these recipients are obliged to portage these containers and their contents through time to the next generation.

Of course, Gross does not fall completely victim to the unchanging expectation in his original definitions. In dragging these vessels through the river of time, they get scraped and dented. Similarly, minor alterations and even major modifications might be made every time a new generation unpacks, uses, and repacks the precious contents of "the somethings" being transmitted. Gross notes: "Nothing historically engendered ever remains fixed or static . . . . Hence, no tradition is ever taken over precisely as it was given, or passed on precisely as it was received" (pp. 13-14). As traditions are conveyed, their actual

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transmission can be accepted, challenged, or assimilated with complete acquiescence or major conflict. To picture this process, Gross enlarges his original reified version of tradition by casting it as a "conversation" between generations. Yet this disembodied summation does not go far enough. Conversations are about something. The manner in which Gross describes tradition as essentially unchanging vessels discharging their wares and ways in every generation leaves one looking at such conversations as those that happen when one pokes through the trunks in grandma's attic, roots through the tool boxes in grandpa's garage, or unwraps their bequests at the reading of a will. Old containers, ancient chests and sacred closets are opened to reveal contents of continuity, cohesion, and community via tradition.

The thing-like quality that Gross grants to tradition also gives it an active subjectivity that frequently distorts his narrative. Looking back into the depths of time, he argues "tradition defined values, established continuities, and codified patterns of behavior" (p. 20). He claims that people came together to survive, but then they nearly disappear as actors as tradition took over the role of binding them together culturally and emotionally. Somehow Gross loses sight of the fact that tradition cannot act or think. *The Past in Ruins* repeatedly suggests that tradition did what nothing (or nobody) else was able to do, i.e., it supplied categories, provided order, stabilized society, preserved heritages, fortified community, fostered dispositions, gave cohesion, produced respect, and encouraged piety (p. 20-23). Yet people, and only people, can do these things. The question is why and how did they do them in ways defined by traditional categories. Traditions are traces of practices and images of continuity revealed in thought and action which are chaotically received throughout generations. Every member of any given generation is not identical with all others in either the reception or transmission of tradition. What rituals, value and interpretations ultimately mean is impossible to determine once and for all. Tradition does not, as Gross claims, "rule" through the millennia as an authoritative subject (p. 20). Rather, human subjects in authority over others use tradition as rules through the millennia to organize collective understanding. Everything is residues, additions, modifications, and emendations; there is no essential core that can be reduced to some immutable gold standard of meaning.

Present

Tradition is not necessarily static, backward, and conservative. Much of it must be dynamic, contemporary and forward-looking because it is actively part of people's everyday life. There is a "modernity" of tradition and a "tradition" of modernity that Gross misses in choosing to retell a variation of the old *Gemeinschaft* becoming *Gesellschaft* narrative, which digs a deep gap between the substantive unity of what apparently was and the instrumental fragmentation of what seems to be. Hence the possibility of having "modernist" beliefs and practices in the traditional past is dismissed as unlikely, and the probability of seeing new "traditionalist" beliefs and practices in the present is

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regarded as impossible outside of vestigial pockets of old otherness within the nooks and crannies, at the margins, or in the underground. One need not necessarily coin neologisms like "modition" or "tradernity" to present these alternative possibilities. All that needs to be done is to ignore the conceptual customs of critical social theory that respect prevailing theoretical traditions by dividing the world into static tradition and dynamic modernity.

Gross overlooks how "traditional" modernity itself has become after six generations of nearly complete dominance as the organizing force in social life. Perhaps he would dodge this claim by arguing that such routines are merely "customs" rather than "traditions." Still, there may be more than state power, corporate greed, and slick images holding together what Gross calls modernity. It is not some irresistible juggernaut that continuously paves over the ruins of the past, leaving tradition to survive only *incognito*. The empiricism and rationalism of modernity never fully embrace "a clear, unbiased perception of the world as it really is" (p. 24) nor totally endorse "reason as the single most reliable authority and guide not only to life, but to truth as well" (p. 25). Beyond the fogged-in discourse of academic shils evangelizing sociology grad students about the rigors of empiricism and rationalism, much of modernity is, was, and will be traditional in its make-up. Believing in clear, unbiased perception of "what really is" is nothing more than a biased presumption of a world cleared for this sort of discovery. And the test of reason continually ends up, as Descartes naively put it, becoming "a rational scheme," dependent on having rationalistic schemers to selectively decide what facts or fancies will have their feet held to the fire of unchecked ratiocination. In view of these limits, maybe tradition and modernity constantly coexist in the modernity of traditions and the traditions of modernity. In other words, modernity itself perhaps develops traditional properties as new generations adapt its premises and implications to their everyday life.

Gross, of course, does not stop with modernity and its powers. He also makes a great deal out of the tremendous pace of change that apparently characterizes today's "postmodernity." Bobbing along in streams of signs across a world of images, postmodern society now "exalts the immediate over the temporally distant, the new over the old, the present over the past" (p. 59). Plainly, the developments that Gross identifies as inhospitable to tradition — the globalization of production and consumption, the robotization/cybernetization of work, the advertising imagery as ideal culture, and the informationalization of society — are pervasive forces. Yet there is also a tremendous changelessness behind many of these changes. Everyday life in the 1990s, with its systems of transportation, communication, production, administration and consumption to styles of clothing, shelter, food, drink, and leisure is in many ways more similar to those of the 1890s than they are to these vaguely dangerous pomo menaces of the immediate, the new, and the present.

We now are five or six generations into the reproduction of urban-industrial capitalism, which has had exurban/global/informational tendencies working

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within it from the rise of streetcar suburbs, predatory imperialism and capitalist cartels in the 1880s. Maybe the "reign of images" (p. 59) is now becoming one of autocratic absolutism, but petty pretenders to this throne were known to our forbearers in the 1850s, 1870s and 1890s. With postmodernism, Gross argues "the battle against tradition is over, that modernism was victorious, that the new not only won, but became institutionalized everywhere" (p. 59). On the one hand, this might mean that tradition, as he sees it, is vanquished. On the other hand, it might mean *the new* also becomes its own substantive tradition "institutionalized everywhere" as a way of regarding others, a way of thinking about the world, a set of observances, and a type of behavior. Are distinctions between "elite and popular culture" (p. 60) or self "as a desiring machine" (p. 60) really recent innovations of postmodernism? Or are they features of a traditionalized modernity with roots in impressionism, big city department stores, silent films, and the Sears and Roebuck catalogue?

Indeed, one might peruse the recent explosion of Burkean laments over the corporate clerics in Chicago issuing a writ of execution to the Sears' mail order catalogue business to fix this point. The Sears' "dream book" provided a set of practices, a constellation of beliefs, a mode of thinking for nearly five generations to millions of desiring machines eager to become something other than they already were. The "big book" clearly institutionalized the new and directly specified how the scattered, disconnected, interchangeable, and ephemeral selves of America could fit into the changing forms of its commodity culture since 1895. As a printed guide, encoding visual statutes, sacred imagery, and exacting authorities of consumption, the Sears' catalogue perhaps is done a major disservice by Gross, who claims, "whenever a tradition is acquired textually, it tends to be grasped as abstract knowledge rather than something immediately, palpably present. Although this might help sharpen an understanding of tradition, at the same time it is likely to weaken allegiance to it" (p. 16).

If Gross had a nickel for every recent op-ed obit or tearful letter to the editor confessing how the female or male writer-as-desiring-machine dreamed away the hours about having some flashy Sears outfits or inspecting the unshrouded mysteries of Sears bra and panty products, he could make a significant dent in the national debt. Moreover, it is also clear that these desiring machines used the dream book in this fashion because ma and pa, grandma and grandpa, if not great-grandma and great-grandpa did so as well. In fact, these real heart-felt testimonies tell of ordinary life all across the land virtually stopping for a festival-like day or week of dreaming by all family members around the kitchen table when the catalogues came out every year. Sneaking off into the back bedroom to fantasize about Craftsman tools, Cheryl Tiegs leisure wear, Kenmore freezers, DieHard batteries, Roebucks intimate apparel, or Ted William's fishing gear has been a connecting tissue holding together "those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born" in America for nearly a century. In a sense, these rituals of consumption happen "in the nooks and

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crannies of modern life" (p. 4). Yet, in another sense, these ritualized practices emerge within and for consumer capitalism. Gross claims that modernity destroys tradition; yet the demise of the Sears catalogue leaves written traces from pomo-selves or "chaotic masses of energies and intensities" (p. 60), recording how a substantive tradition emerged as part of modernity, continued through generations of desiring machines, and organized life in each generation around values and practices passed on from earlier generations.

One need not stop with the Sears catalogue. The forms of the urban built environment, the protocols of motorized transportation, the codes of family diet or ordinary dress and the reception of many mass media performances have traditional qualities. Perhaps Gross would dismiss these tendencies as custom, but there are traits of tradition in hi-rise skyscraper design, traffic systems, family meal recipes, suburban fashion, Grateful Dead concerts, and watching *Casablanca* — to mention only a handful — that tie three or more generations into cohesive communities of continuity. These practices did not exist in precapitalist feudal societies; instead, they have emerged only with the allegedly minimal selves of modernity. However, it is a rhetorical ploy to reduce these linkages between generations to empty simulacra manufactured by the state, corporations, and the mass media.

Future

One need not look outside, underground or in cracks for otherness. This would be a new version of Marcuse's call to turn to outsiders as the only authentic agents of social transformation. An immanent critique of the present will or should find people everywhere enacting and valuing practices and beliefs that are traditional, modern, and postmodern. Some are obvious, a few are obscure, and most are already operating. Yet it is always difficult to decide definitely what is mainly past, what is purely present, and what is largely future because all these judgments are made in the present by people whose understanding of the synchronous/non-synchronous, the old/new, and the traditional/modern oppositions is actively constructed now. They are not passive transmitters of the essentially unchanged past or unchallenged creators of the overdetermined future. Instead, people construct tradition and modernity in thought, speech, feeling, and action, whose authenticity can be judged only in these actually lived terms rather than those discursively drawn from Rousseau's *First Discourse*, Marx's *Capital*, or Weber's *Protestant Ethic*, which are in turn only thinly disguised in *The Past in Ruins*.

This is what separates those Gross calls "*Telos* neo-populists" from *The Past in Ruins*. Traditions, old and new, ancient and modern, in code and in practice, are actual — not merely potential — integrative forces. Gross is wrong: not all substantive traditions are traditional, not all substantive traditions are destroyed, not all substantive traditions are instrumentalized. Hence the alleged decline of tradition and ascendance of modernity as mutually exclusive tendencies is questionable. Traditions are manifest, not latent. They are not buried treasures

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awaiting excavation like old pirate chests to be forced open and spent as valuable essences of "old ways" to fix our "new ways." Nor are traditions fragmented bits and pieces of a dead past to be cobbled together on the lab tables of Critical Theory, lifted lifelessly into the thunderstorms of popular protests, struck by lightning bolts of reanimating communal energy, and then used to redeem the otherwise lost souls of modernity. Authentic traditions do exist in particular face-to-face relations at the micro-level of personal ties, family life, work practices, political groups, religious sects, educational institutions, intellectual discourses, and regional cultures. While the old *Gemeinschaft* becoming *Gesellschaft* story is fascinating, it hardly provides a definitive means of certifying what is and is not an authentic tradition. Instead, as Gross himself concedes, the realization of authentic community, cohesion and continuity can be attained or missed only in particular micro-level relations on a face-to-face level.

The *Telos* neo-populists' interest in developing new forms of federalism, local community, and autonomous ecological economics also differs from "the new populism" being celebrated in the mass media after Clinton's victory in 1992. Talk show confessionals, paid half-hour infomercials, and neo-Jeffersonian bus caravans to rural feedstores will not, despite the current credos of Clintonian telepopulism or H. Ross Perot's corporate communitarianism, provide the basis of a new federalism worth having. Still, at times, these political tactics seem to illustrate what Gross favors as the means for critically reappropriating the past and its otherness to embrace and advance the course of modernity (pp. 128-130). In comparison to the Reagan/Bush era, according to the tests Gross gives "modernity" facing "tradition," both Clinton and Perot see their teledemocratic strategies as obtaining elements of truth, enriching presences in the world, creating new heterogeneity, advancing a critical consciousness, and promoting a new autonomous responsibility (p. 129). Therefore, as Bill and Hillary, Al and Tipper bop to the populist beat, does Gross also ask us to "don't stop thinking about tomorrow" because "yesterday's gone, yesterday's gone"? Jeffersonian faith in people perhaps may sell as televisual Q-and-A with school kids at Monticello, Jacksonian acceptance of the masses might fly as a CNN- formatted reception line at the White House, and Elvis-like humility could reach out on the phone and touch someone in your house from the White House. Unfortunately, however, these new tactics of tradition — whether it is Clinton's televisualization of Donahued face-to-face community or Perot's computerized simulacra of angry mob wisdom called forth on *Larry King Live* — appear to fit the old strategies of modernity. Consequently, neo-populists cannot stop thinking about the present, because yesterday is here. And tomorrow is here as well.

As a coherent alternative, neo-populism stands instead for building a truly participatory democratic order from below, and not imposing another set of designer expectations from above. The writs of authority must be rethought to found a federalism of autonomous communities rather than one of pernicious bureaucracies. Individual responsibility should replace passive administrative clientage as the basis of everyday personal life. Real technological, economic,

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political, and cultural empowerment must anchor a new vision of "the good life" in local, regional, national commonwealths free from racism, provincialism, xenophobia, sexism or religious hatreds. These communities should recast their vision of space and resources to live more harmoniously within their particular ecological settings. The *Telos* neo-populists agree with Gross that tradition can provide some guidance in making these changes, but modernity might contribute many useful directions as well. Ultimately, neo-populists, as well as Gross, are driven by a recognition more disturbing than the title given to Gross' book. Yesterday is gone and lost, but the ruination of the present is also rapidly ruining the future as it pulverizes the past.

Confucian Capitalism: Recycling Traditions

Sang-ki Kim

The conclusions of David Gross' *The Past in Ruins* are far too timid. This may be due to his being too embedded in modernity. According to Gross, each individual would have to decide with regard to traditions whether some truth would be irretrievably lost if they disappeared; or whether traditions would help to advance critical consciousness; or whether traditions improve individual autonomy or strengthen moral awareness. These, however, are academic issues because the question of tradition arises only in the context of crises and, therefore always involves critical reflection on the present situation. According to Gross: "The reappropriation of tradition is, in itself, no alternative to an immanent critique of modernity. It is only a means to broaden and deepen the methods of immanent critique by tapping into a wealth of material that normally lies outside its range . . . this material includes the nonsynchronous elements of discontinued traditions, as well as the surplus of excess meaning still present in continuing ones. Both kinds of differences are valuable because they provoke contradictions, challenge modern technologies of power and control . . ."[1] Why does he conclude with a truism which should have been his point of departure? Because he is worried about protecting individual autonomy against state and market manipulation, whereas the root of present crises is the erosion of the very foundation of those traditional institutions indispensable for social stability.

1. David Gross: *The Past in Ruins* (Amherst: The University of Massachussets Press, 1992), p. 135.

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The task is to reconstitute traditions in order to buttress a modernity which cannot sustain itself without a strong traditional framework.

Gross sharply demarcates modernity from tradition and dismisses a return to tradition as impossible. But in order to carry out an immanent critique of modernity it is necessary to reappropriate fading traditions. Specifically, to sustain modernity it is essential to revitalize communities and their institutions, especially the traditional family.[2] This revitalization of traditions is not a purely intellectual exercise — an immanent critique — but a concrete political project. Gross' disappointing conclusion is the result of the false premise which abstractly contraposes tradition to modernity. But the life-world always contains sedimented meanings, and modernity is ultimately only a part of the larger traditional framework of European civilization — the part pretending to be independent of its historical roots. As a result, Gross provides a strange diagnosis and proposes simplistic solutions. He thinks capitalism is hostile to tradition because it thrives on novelty. "If capitalism is to work properly, the way has to be prepared for a constant dislodging of habit, and continuous expansion of desires and expectations."[3] This is misleading, since it emphasizes only half of the story, e.g., consumerism, while ignoring the more important features having to do with savings, investments, productive activities and, above all, the maintenance of law and order. With the decline of discipline and the work ethic in the West, the ever-expanding pull of the market has made the economies of Japan and the newly industrialized economies (NIEs) grow, but it has brought the US a $4 trillion national debt and has led to the erosion of its industrial foundation. Gross argues that while "accepting modernity *tout court*, we need to acquire more critical leverage against its most dangerous tendencies, and for this we need contact with the otherness of tradition."[4] Here tradition is deployed as a kind of substitute for vitamin A pills to cure nyctalopia.

There is no more striking contrast to the Western tendency to constantly dislodge old habits than the historical efforts of the Japanese to preserve them. In this respect, the way the Japanese deal with traditions clarifies some of the problems Gross discusses. On the whole, Japan has been more successful than Western countries in stemming the tide against egoism and nihilism. This is due to a strong commitment to communitarian values and social cohesion. Hyper-individualism is effectively mitigated by the continuing importance of traditions. Ernest Gellner writes: "The brilliant economic success of some Far East societies suggests that whereas Calvinist individualism may have favored the initial appearance of the new order, once it has come into being, and its

2. Why is it so important to preserve and strengthen the *traditional* family? There is no transcendental reason for doing so. Yet it is becoming increasingly clear that children from other types of families have a much more difficult time achieving intimacy in relationships, maintaining stable marriages or even holding steady jobs. The result is usually social disintegration. For one of the more recent analyses along these lines, see Barbara Dafoe Whitehead: "Dan Quayle was Right," in *Atlantic* (April 1993), pp. 47-84.

3. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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advantages are clear to all, it can better be run in a Confucian-collectivist spirit. This isn't yet fully established, but it constitutes a distinct possibility."[5] While it may be unwarranted to explain the economic success of Japan in terms of Confucian influences without taking many other things into account (e.g., the condition of world economy, the role of US support, the political stability maintained by one dominant party, technological innovations, and other practices that have little to do with Confucianism), Gellner raises an interesting question. Most likely, however, Confucianism may turn out to be only one of many contributing factors in Japan's performance, just as the Protestant ethic was for the rise of capitalism in the West. One should not overlook the fact that Confucianism is also a major source of problems.

Once Japan opened the door to the West, the Japanese were so impressed by the superiority of Western civilization that there was a saying: "America is our mother, France our father." Caught in such a wave of admiration for the West, in the 1870s they repudiated their own traditions. They soon realized the mistake they had made and, in the 1880s, began resurrecting Confucian ethics as the basis of moral education to counter the West's "corrupting" influences. The guiding principles of education became loyalty to the emperor and filial piety, which turned out to be effective antidotes against Western "decadence." In the process, the national consciousness and patriotism deployed to induce the people to bear the sacrifices necessary for industrialization had disastrous consequences. They not only built a modern nation but also an expansionist military powerhouse which ended in WWII and Japan's crushing defeat.

By all standards, the post-WWII performance of Japan's economy has been astounding, yet it appears miraculous only to outsiders unfamiliar with the way Japan has deliberately preserved its pre-modern traditions. At the beginning of industrialization, many workers were poorly-paid young women from the countryside employed in textile factories. Male workers trained in Japan's pre-modern apprentice system were highly mobile in comparison to their European counterparts. They developed a political consciousness which clashed with Japan's feudal traditions. During the Daisho Democracy (1913-1925), liberal-progressive forces gained strength and helped bring about a significant number of reforms. At that time, feminists increasingly challenged Confucian morality.

But the crises of world capitalism aborted these reforms and Japan took the path of military expansion. It was at this time (1925-1945) that Japan created its present capitalist system. The Japanese sought to undermine the values and practices of modernity and to revitalize their traditions in order to support the military-*zaibatsu* by sustaining a high rate of accumulation. It took more than paternalism to achieve this. Confucian ideology, like other ideologies, works best with the backing of tangible benefits. Employers, especially large corporations, put an end to high labor mobility and their class-consciousness with three main policies: life-time employment predicated on a strict seniority system;

5. Ernest Gellner: *Times Literary Supplement* (Feb. 23, 1993), No. 4690, p. 3.

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large lump-sum retirement payments; and generous fringe benefits such as company-run housing, medical care, and recreation. As a result, both blue and white collar workers came to relate to their companies as substitute kinship organizations. The process of training youngsters to be devoted employees was called *kogai*, which literally means "to raise kids." These "kids" could retire at age 55. Major pre-war corporations successfully replaced mobile workers with their own home-grown kind who were jealously shielded from labor unions. During WWII this newly constituted traditional relation was perfected through numerous emergency decrees to support *kogai* nationwide, prevent labor mobility and mobilize a new work force through coercion. This vertical hierarchy bonding benevolent lords and their grateful vassals has been the secret of Japan's economic power to this day.[6]

After WWII Japan entered a Renaissance in the wake of sweeping US-imposed democratic reforms. When the imperial system was dismantled its socio-economic foundations crumbled, and as the semi-feudal land-ownership was abolished, pervasive paternalism waned. As the domestic market expanded along with the world economy, rapid industrial growth began in Japan around 1960. In this massive modernization process, traditional values underwent considerable modifications to become a powerful force buffering the internal contadictions of capitalism. Emperor-worship was replaced by company loyalty.

Ezra Vogel has argued that Japanese success has less to do with traditional character traits than with specific organizational structures, policies and conscious planning which non-Japanese or Americans can learn.[7] This suggestion, however, remains meaningless unless one understands the Japanese's conscious effort to reconstitute their traditions. Specific practices cannot be duplicated at will elsewhere simply because they are deemed profitable. Already in 1908, Soeta Juichi warned that Japan must avoid at all costs Western-type class antagonisms.[8] He proposed that Japan develop a new kind of labor-capital relation based on a vertical kinship of respect and gratitude on the part of employees and of love and benevolence on the part of employers. As trite as it may sound, he correctly understood the problems of capitalism. Although controversial, this advice was heeded and translated into practice by conservative leaders such as Yasuoka Masahiro. A Confucian physiocrat, Yasuoka was critical of urban civilization. If urbanization was unavoidable, it was necessary to try to preserve the roots of rural Japan. To revitalize agrarian communities, semi-feudal landlords and the country gentry had to be educated to become leaders, and this *Bildung* had to be based on Confucianism. In 1930 he founded a private institute, the Nihon Noshi Gacko, because he thought that "As culture matures, people tend to lose their lofty ideals and noble passions, and indulge

6. Okochi Kazuo, *Korekara no roshikankei* (Tokyo: Kadansha,1966).

7. Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lesson for America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p.ix.

8. Soeta Juichi, "1908 Lecture at Tokyo University," quoted in Okochi, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

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in decadent hedonism and cowardly indolence. They become unreliable and unredeemable. In such a juncture, only the country Samurai who lives a noble life free from contamination of a decadent culture can bring life back to the nation."[9] He wanted to educate leaders to create self-sufficient mini-states out of their agrarian communities, and jokingly called this movement of self-reliance his "new feudalism."[10] He was so successful that after the war he was suspected to be a major war criminal. The US estimated that at least a quarter million people were influenced by his ultra-nationalist teachings. Thanks to Chiang Kai-shek, who admired Yasuoka's scholarship, he was spared and continued to exert tremendous influence on many business leaders and conservative statesmen, from Yoshida to Nakasone. If Japan will not replenish these country samurais in business suits and overalls when they will eventually retire, the myth of Japanese capitalism will come to an abrupt end.

What are the lessons of Japan's successful reappropriation of traditions? Since for the foreseeable future there are few likely alternatives to capitalism, system maintenance remains crucial. People who lose their work ethics will not be able to uphold their standards of living in the open world market. In the West, people will have to work as hard as the Japanese, who are willing to work overtime without pay — a practice that gives them an edge over their Western counterparts. But Japanese working overtime without pay are comparable to millionaires clipping food-coupons. This practice is not criticized because everyone admires workaholism — something which has become a fading memory for Westerners. Of course, imitating Japan's Confucian ideology is out of the question. Yet communitarianism has always been an integral part of American self-identity. Christopher Dawson traces the birthplace of modern democracy in the theocratic congregations of the Puritans in New England, where they took care of each other's economic and spiritual needs.[11] This communitarian tradition could be definitely revitalized.

In order to reverse the decay of American inner cities it is necessary to produce people committed to their communities. Gross mentions republican civic virtue in an endnote: "Because of its rejection of possessive individualism and its hostility to interest group politics, the republican tradition has not found a place for itself at the center of twentieth century political life."[12] If such is the case, 20th century politics are doomed. Yet, Japanese who are by no means less possessive than Westerners, have managed to subordinate possessive individualism to communitarian values. Confucius may have had something to do with it.

The essence of Confucius' teaching is filial piety built on love and affection between parents and children. On this natural ethics of moral sentiment it is

9. Quoted in Kamiwatari Ryohei, *Yasuoka Masahiro no sekai* (Tokyo: Toshinsha, 1991), p. 170.

10. *Ibid.*, p.171.

11. Christopher Dawson, *The Gods of Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), pp. 38-41.

12. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

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possible to build relations of trust without which no society can function. Confucius' universal principle of humanity is based on affection among family members. This presupposes a closed relation and gradation of that emotion according to distance from primary blood relations. This is why Han Fei Tzu, the Machiavelli of ancient China, ridiculed Confucius as a simpleton whose teachings were suitable for small villages. Emperors and statesmen from Shi Hwang Ti to Mao Ze-dong have followed Han Fei Tzu and used iron-clad statecraft while exploiting Confucianism as a legitimating ideology. In a word, the substance of China's politics has been legalism with a Confucian façade.

Hegel was contemptous of Confucian ethics — an ethics which lacks mediation between particularity and universality. He claimed that Confucius' teachings.were nothing more than "a commonplace moral put in the form of good, sound doctrine, which may be found as well expressed and better in every place and amongst every people."[13] He even ridiculed Confucius: "We may conclude from his original works that for their reputation it would have been better had they never been translated."[14] Nevertheless, he himself took exactly the same position in his discussion of Socrates: he defended the verdict that Socrates was guilty of meddling with the relation between Anytos and his son. "Children must have the feeling of unity with their parents; this is the first immediately moral relationship . . . The worst thing which can happen to children in regard to their morality and their mind, is that the bond which must ever be held in reverence should become loosened or even be severed, thereby causing hatred, disdain, and ill will. Whoever does this, does injury to morality in its truest form. This unity, this confidence, is the mother's milk of morality, on which man is nurtured."[15]

Confucius took this immediate natural morality to the extreme. The Duke of She told Confucius, "In my country there is an upright man named Kung. When his father stole a sheep, he bore witness against him." Confucius replied: "The upright men in my community are different. The father conceals the misconduct of the son and the son conceals the misconduct of father. Uprightness is to be found in this."[16] This is where Confucius parted from Plato, Roman law and even Hegel, who took family as the most fundamental pillar of ethical life. Confucius believed in the primacy of family morality over the law of the state, and this view became a nest of paradoxes since he preached that communitarian virtues such as righteousness and harmony, and the ideal of pacifying the world, would naturally come out of filial piety. For him the state is nothing but an enlarged family, and his ideal of uprightness is simply the individuals' love for their parents and children. This approach

13. Hegel: *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (London, Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 121.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 437.
16. Confucius, *The Analects*, 13:18. Quoted from Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 41.

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inevitably clashed with statism. Mao's attack on Confucianism during the Cultural Revolution was only the latest instance of this incompatibility. Confucius aimed at rebuilding the supposedly ideal feudal system of the Chou Dynasty. Yet the individualistic and anarchistic tendency of his teaching would weaken such a system. In fact, in the history of China, Confucian family individualism has been a kind of centrifugal force whenever the state has encroached on private life. The resilience of Confucianism is not due to its being an official legitimating ideology, but to its tendency toward individualism and anarchism.[17] Where Confucian family ethics reigns, rampant corruption and nepotism become the norm. Thus all successful dictators in China, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore had to strike a delicate balance by suppressing family egoism while trying to preserve family ethics. Confucianism helps to maintain law and order, and to encourage education, but does little else to promote industrialization.

Japan's capitalism is unique in that it is a successful combination of family ethics and statism. While Confucianism was the basis of *Bildung* for the samurai, they transferred their filial piety to feudal lords. Since the Meiji Restoration this feudal tradition has been transformed into Emperor worship and ultra-nationalism and, subsequently, Confucian family ethics were expanded to create the cooperative relation of employers and employees. Murakami Yasusuke's accout of *ie* (which literally means *oikos*) helps explain the Japanese situation.[18] But *ie* was not an ordinary household since it was not merely a kinship framework. It was also a military organization. It had a hierarchy attuned to the requirements of warfare. Most remarkably, it ignored blood line. Murakami argues that these unique organizations joined into federations to create large, powerful feudal fiefs.

Murakami characterizes *ie* as a kinship as well as a contractual community. Once one joins it, membership lasts for life. Adoption of children is common. The *ie* has a strong lineage to perpetuate its identity. Leadership is passed on from father to son or adopted son. Within the *ie* efforts are made to maintain and strengthen internal cohesion among members, since the latter tends to be weakened by a rigid hierarchy. Lastly, the *ie* is self-sufficient. It is economically productive enough to meet all the material needs of its members, while maintaining independence in defense and internal law enforcement.

All these traditional organizational principles are carefully preserved in today's Japan. Contractual kinship may appear to be an oxymoron, but it lingers on in the practice of life-time employment, and employers still prefer beginners over experienced workers. It is the modern version of the old practice of adoption of children. The *ie* lineage is maintained in the belief that the company should survive no matter what, and they make great efforts not to fire employees, even during serious recessions. They preserve harmony and promote comradery in their system of hierarchy, while employees also enjoy flexibility of assignments for different tasks. In the *ie* tradition, companies attempt to meet

17. Kojima Arima, *Chukoku shisoshi* (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1968), pp. 52-54.
18. Murakami Yasusuke, *Bunmei toshiteno jeshakai* (Tokyo, Chuokoronsha, 1979).

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many of their employees' needs by providing housing, subsidizing children's education, organizing recreations etc. The company as an extended family pursues self-sufficiency. The "soul" of these mini-states is Confucianism.

Only about one fourth of Japanese workers enjoy all the benfits of *ie*-like companies. Workers employed in small businesses do not have anything even close to that kind of care and protection. This dual structure of the labor-force constitutes a pyramid-like labor hierarchy. It is not an ideal arrangment, but a highly efficient and stable one: a masterpiece of reconstituted traditions. Can this success story be reproduced elsewhere? Korea and Taiwan seem to have been able to do so. Can Westerners learn from Japan? Large American corporations are not likely to follow the model of the US Marine Corps with millions of recruits from Quaker families. Similarly, not many Westerners seem bent on converting to Confucianism, let alone trying to copy Japan's *ie*. Confucianism not only teaches filial piety but also encourages sexism, nepotism, hierarchy and cultural chauvinism — it is "politically incorrect" through and through. But the intricate dynamics between capitalism and Japan's deliberate tradition of contractual kinship is pertinent to a general discussion of modernity and tradition. The material base of modernity is capitalism, and the latter cannot prosper where traditional communitarian discipline, especially the work ethic, has collapsed. Marx accurately saw a parallel between modern industry and military organizations, and this parallel remains even in post-modern, post-industrial societies. This may well be the core paradox of modernity — a paradox Gross fails to address in his text.

The Utopian Function of Tradition

Jack Zipes

In *The Past in Ruins* David Gross argues that the "otherness" of tradition can be used for a radical critique of capitalism. However, there is a problem with his notion of the critical appropriation of tradition to provide a sense of identity and community — the driving force behind the rise of contemporary regionalism and federalism. Gross minimizes the utopian function of both new and old traditions and therefore downplays the value of the populist effort to reconstitute and nurture traditions as something belonging to the people.

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The Utopian Value of Tradition

Gross states that his term "critical appropriation" stems from Critical Theory and the notions of Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and other Marxist intellectuals of the 1920s regarding *Umfunktionierung* (refunctioning or reutilization). He defines this term as "extracting and rearranging elements from within the capitalist system in order to set them against capitalism itself, a process Bloch referred to as salvaging 'that which is true in false consciousness' " (108). Than he adds: "as it turned out, however, the real masters of the art of refunctioning were not Weimar's left-wing intellectuals but the modern state and the modern economy. And the greatest successes of refunctioning have not been those that subverted bourgeois values but those that transformed many of the old traditions, forcing them to serve ends for which they were not initially intended" (108).

There were at least two types of refunctioning: the first takes charge of a certain current of tradition and maintains it by appending new meanings; the second takes possession of an entire tradition and imbues it with new layers of signification and social tasks. However, what is one to do, Gross asks, when traditions are instrumentalized by the market and the state to create a false sense of harmony and/or to manipulate desire by using new inventions and technology to maintain old power structures and traditional hierarchies? His answer is to develop a subversive genealogy to address the exploitative refunctioning of tradition "first, by analyzing what is closest at hand — the instrumentalized and commodified traditions that surround us — and would then move backward in time in order to chart their origin and development. It would do this by breaking down contemporary refunctionings into their parts, showing what role each part now plays and what new meanings have been assigned to each artificially sustained tradition. This amounts to the synchronic first step of a subversive genealogy. But second this kind of genealogy would need to shift into a diachronic dimension by tracing each reworked facet of a tradition back in time in order to locate the point where an apparently authentic tradition, or part of one, became inauthentic: the point, that is, where it began to be pulled from its context and refunctioned politically or economically" (117-18).

The practice of subversive genealogy is not to recuperate traditions that have been marginalized, suppressed, or occluded but to "reconsider what might be called the refuse of the dialectic, not in order to increase social cohesion or promote a *restitutio in integrum*, but in order to acquire a vantage point on modernity based in what modernity has banished or repressed" (135). A critique of tradition is therefore valuable only if it creates a new sense of tradition by revealing how fruitless it is to reclaim or recuperate tradition. By seeing tradition as "the other" we gain a sense of what was unfulfilled and still needs to be fulfilled.

All this may be true from a radical professor's perspective or from the perspective of the market and the state, i.e., from the viewpoint of the theoreticians and manipulators of tradition, but what about the producers? That is,

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what about the people? — not the people in the romantic and nostalgic sense of the word (those rural people close to nature and living in a non-commodified community) but the majority of people in different societies who define themselves through communal associations. Gross is so preoccupied with how traditions are manipulated that his major focus is on the exposure of such manipulation, *not* with understanding how people come together to create customs, art forms, and social codes to give themselves a sense of identity and cohesion. Yet what good is a critical appropriation of tradition by radical intellectuals if it does not enable people to sustain their *life-worlds* and give their endeavors some sense of meaning? In other words, how have people been using their traditions, in light of their instrumentalization by governments and market forces, to make sense of their existence?

In contrast to Gross, Bloch, Benjamin and Brecht raised the question of *Umfunktionierung* not as an intellectual or pedagogical question but to address political and cultural practices during the 1920s and 1930s. That is, they were concerned that the people might become "*völkisch*" because their traditions were being fulfilled by the Nazis. The reutilization of tradition through the theater and storytelling was to be a political practice that would use montage and discontinuity to alienate audiences so they could gain distance from their situation, think, deliberate, and decide what they wanted to do with their lives. Bloch wrote about this in various essays during the 1920s and in *Heritage of Our Times* (1934); Benjamin did the same in *The Storyteller* and his essays on Brecht and epic theater; and Brecht practiced reutilization through his epic theater and alienation-effect during the 1930s. The utopian *telos* of reutilization as practice was to create *solidarity* through the understanding of contradictions and open endings that audiences, i.e., the people, were supposed to resolve. Such resolution would involve cohesion by understanding differences, coming together to resolve differences, and through this coming together maintain an identity.

It is not by chance that Bloch, Benjamin. and Brecht were continually attracted to folklore, folk tales, fairy tales, and popular culture. If "authentic" culture was to be passed on, to be *tradiert,* then it was best done through "trading" tales, for the best of storytellers took their material from the life experiences of the people and returned this material to them to keep alive their hope that the small persons could overcome obstacles, outwit giants, and determine their own destinies. The listeners of these tales reshaped them, responded, made changes, and interacted with the tellers in a way that enabled them to share in the production of the tales. Benjamin glorified the true storytellers and Bloch idealized the fairy tale, both arguing that they shed light on the potential of humankind to devise concrete utopias that could be gleaned from the indestructible vestiges or surplus value of tradition.

Storytelling and Tradition in America

Though Bloch and Benjamin (not so much Brecht) idealized storytelling, they also addressed the question of nurturing and cultivating "authentic" traditions

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appropriate to the needs of the people in ways other intellectuals of their day did not. And they did this to show a very common way that people were trying to resist or could resist the manipulation of tradition. Unlike most of the members of the Frankfurt School, Benjamin and Bloch were concerned with developing strategies that the people could use to maintain their autonomy, and they were concerned, as was Brecht, that the term "*Volk*" and folklore would be totally appropriated by the Nazis. To tell tales was to govern and narrate tradition, and Bloch, Benjamin and Brecht were determined in the 1930s to underscore the historical necessity of telling tales to deflate the myths of Nazism. Of course, there was no "free" storytelling under the Nazis, but the clandestine telling of tales was a way of forming resistance and maintaining traditions in Germany and throughout Europe.

In the US there are other forms of oppression, and one of more interesting movements that has developed since the 1970s is the resurgence of storytelling, which is connected to the pursuit of tradition by various ethnic and regional groups. Perhaps a way of focusing on this "boom" of storytelling would be to study the history of The National Association for the Preservation and Perpetuation of Storytelling (NAPPS). Founded in Jonesborough, Tennessee in 1975, this tiny organization, formed to support authentic storytellers who work with traditional material (customs, legends, jokes, etc.) in dialects belonging to the people of their group, has expanded dramatically. Not only does it sponsor meetings of storytellers throughout the country, but it publishes a monthly magazine, *Storytelling*, and a newsletter, *Yarnspinner.* In addition, it distributes a *National Directory of Storytelling* so that the tellers can stay in touch with one another and can also be reneted also by schools, theaters, colleges, organizations, etc. As in any development that begins small and has its roots in the people, there is now a strong commodity aspect to the productions and performances of storytellers. They often package themselves as standup comedians. But, of course, the techniques of standup comedians, who often represented and kept alive ethnic traditions in the US, originated in traditional storytelling. In other words, despite the commercialization of storytelling, it takes the surplus power of tradition and propels it forward to bring people together so they can feel united against the oppressive forces that divide them.

Every Friday night several gifted storytellers in Minneapolis come together and perform at the Seward Cafe. More generally, there is a substantial community of storytellers in Minnesota, who make their living by going to schools, universities, celebrations, bookstores, libraries, parties, organizatians, etc. Some have a large repertoire of different tales. Sometimes their audiences are adult, sometimes, children; often they encompass all ages. Whatever the topic or audience is, the storyteller always tries *immediately* to form a community with the audience lasting as long as there is something to share. For the most part, storytellers want to impart a sense of who they are through the stories, and the audience can thus react and participate as it wishes.

What is crucial in the storytelling acts in Minnesota and those sponsored

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throughout the States by NAPPS is *not* the "success" of the different storytellers in forming cohesive groups and in leading people to rediscover their ethnic, religious or national identity. Rather, the different types of storytelling are symptomatic of organizing and communicating on a grass-roots level that signify both a search for and rebuilding of tradition. It is the re-formation of families and communities that has engendered such a great resurgence of interest in storytelling in the US.

This resurgence is overlooked by Gross in his study of how the past can be and actually is being used in a populist manner to protect hopes for a different "world order" than the government can offer. Interestingly, the resurgence has not gone unnoticed among folklorist and ethnologists. In the most recent issue of the *Journal of American Folklore,* Roger Abrahams has called upon folklorists to shake off the phantoms of romantic nationaliam and to address the complex nature in which tradition is being simultaneously preserved and changed in new communal forms: "Rather than regarding vernacular languages and procedures as systems in place, our altered view regards communication of any sort as an accomplishment carried out in common by members of a speech-community, a performance-community and an interpretive-community. But clearly we must bring such ideas of community into line with the ways in which increasingly voluntaristic and plural societies are organizing themselves experientially and practically. It has been clear for some time that forms of popular culture organized around high-intensity experiences (such as festivals or marches) and around stylized and technique-driven activities such as dancing, sky-diving, camping, sports-spectating, or collecting of any sort) create the possibilities for communities that seldom meet face-to-face. Moreover, we must not regard such instant communities as simple outgrowths of the pop-culture industries, for their developed vernacular forms often contain elements that are, in fact resistant to the mechanical reproduction techniques that originally brought them into being. Processes such as customization and the construction of the pastiche makes this self-evident."

Whereas until recently folklorists have tended to glorify "the past in ruins" in their work, lately there has been a strong tendency to reflect critically upon the past as the "lore" they recover, which is being used to mark out a future that can lead to a new sense of community. Gross seems to have stopped short and has remained within the bounds of the university and the classroom in analyzing what is being done with tradition. The university is part of "the past in ruins," and the "other of tradition" is not to be found within it.

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Tradition and Critique

Deborah Cook

Anthony Giddens has recently located modernity's fault lines in the loss of the binding normative character of traditions. This loss is countered by attempts to reestablish or create "new" traditions. Such attempts do not represent a nostalgic bid for something irretrievably lost, but rather "an incipient move beyond a world dominated by internally referential systems."[1] Giddens recommends "life-political issues" as the vehicles for "the return of the institutionally repressed" tradition.[2]

Tradition is not buried in the past but something latent in everyday life which may still be reactivated. Gidden's approach, however, is to use traditions as psychological props. He robs them of their moral force by reducing them to security blankets which "we moderns" have never quite managed to do without. Yet, even if one views traditions in a non-psychological sense as relatively stable norms have been displaced today by the "I'm Okay, You're Okay" ethos, the recommendation to return to them may still amount to nostalgia for pre-modern forms of existence untainted by state-bureaucracies or the mass-media.

The desire to restore those aspects of tradition which are thought to provide secure normative frameworks in everyday life often combines with virulent critiques of mass-mediated culture either from the standpoint of high culture or from the perspective of a folk or popular culture thought to have emerged spontaneously from the everyday interests and concerns of "the people." Reinforced by the media, conformity to the *status quo* (defined in terms of the economic interests of a powerful ruling élite) is said to have displaced traditional ethoi. The resulting disorientation and loss of an autonomous culture leaves the individual at the mercy of the exchange principle. Although this bleak view is not widespread, it does often serve as the negative limit for contemporary interpretations and analyses of traditions. Clearly things are not quite that bad and attempts are made to determine what can be salvaged from whatever traditional practices have continued to survive. Currently, however, these attempts are plagued by a preoccupation with legitimizing the standpoint of the critic. This concern runs through both Adorno's and Gross' work.[3]

1. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) p. 207.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

3. Theodor W. Adorno, "Theorie der Halbbildung," *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 8 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972); and "On Tradition," in this issue of *Telos*. David

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Both Adorno and Gross approach tradition in a similar way. Nostalgia for, and rejection of, tradition are two sides of the same coin. Adorno's advice is to neither forget nor adapt to tradition. Tradition should not be forgotten because what is without tradition is naive and ultimately leads to barbarism. Conversely, one should not adapt to traditions since those social forms which used to transmit them have really vanished and cannot be revived. This antinomy translates into the practice of confronting tradition "with the most advanced consciousness already attained" and asking "what passes and what does not"[4] within it. Some elements of tradition — the more outdated ones — should be consciously appropriated even though tradition itself has, as its medium, not consciousness but the "pregiven, unreflected and binding existence of social forms."[5]

According to Adorno, the model for such a relation to tradition is exemplified by Samuel Beckett who maintains the antinomy: he neither forgets tradition nor adapts to it. In Beckett's plays, which offer "the concretely executed critique of the traditional concept of meaning,"[6] tradition crumbles. At the same time, however, Beckett also produces meaning in a traditional way. This antinomy allows him to criticize effectively the absurd state of affairs in the modern world. Not surprisingly then, in "On Tradition," Adorno proposes high modernism as the standpoint for productive critique.

According to Gross, one should neither discount "former traditions as irrelevant," nor "flee to them for emotional support." Instead, it might be useful to "salvage certain outmoded traditions by asking what they can contribute to solving contemporary problems."[7] Not all traditions or elements thereof warrant reclamation. Criteria for reclamation include: truth value, prospects for enriching life, heterogeneity and diversity, and promotion of critical consciousness, autonomy, responsibility, and moral self-awareness.[8] Traditions meeting these criteria provide the basis for critique by virtue of their difference from the present. They offer critical leverage with respect to the normative dimension of everyday life — a dimension which has been rendered problematic because modern societies are now "anti-traditional." "[T]he primary value of reclaiming the traces of tradition and juxtaposing them to modernity lies in the potential of this method to shock people into clearer assessments of what is (or should be) considered normative."[9] Although, like Adorno, Gross believes that tradition is lived pre-reflectively, he claims that a conscious and critical reappropriation of tradition may defamiliarize the present. In other words, he inverts the credo of high modernism: instead of the shock of the new, it is the old which now has shock value.

Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity* (Amhearst, MA.: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

4. Adorno, "On Tradition," *op. cit.*, p. 79.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
7. Gross, *The Past in Ruins*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

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For Adorno, modern societies are post-traditional; for Gross they are anti-traditional because broader intellectual, political and economic trends oppose the survival of tradition. Adorno insists that traditions have really been lost, while Gross claims that some traditions or fragments thereof have survived although they often lead a marginal or underground life. The fact that such continue to exist facilitates their reappropriation by the critic. Participation in the surviving "substantive" — as opposed to "symbolic"[10] — traditions also provides a standpoint for critique. Although this standpoint is ironic (since to choose to participate in tradition runs against the grain of tradition itself, which is generally lived "naturally and spontaneously"), Gross claims that conscious participation in certain critically selected living traditions "may represent something higher than being in tradition by accident."[11] Like dead traditions, some living ones have a critical force by virtue of their difference from "anti-traditional" modernity. On the whole, Gross's position is that a traditional perspective must be adopted in order to engage in critique. By contrast, the critical standpoint of high modernism preserves the antinomy of neither forgetting nor adapting to tradition.

In "Theory of Pseudo-Culture" Adorno criticizes pseudo-culture from the standpoint of an equally problematic culture. Culture's hypostatization of spirit, its separation of the mental and the physical, are described as perpetrating the old injustice of the division of mental and physical labor. A culture which posits itself as autonomous "has already become pseudo-culture." But even where culture is believed to shape the life world, it stresses "the moment of adaptation,"[12] or conformity. For these reasons, to use culture as the standpoint for productive critique is problematic: "if nothing but the traditional concept of culture, which may itself be criticized, will serve as the antithesis of socialized pseudo-culture, this expresses the difficulty of a situation which disposes of no better criterion than just this questionable one because it has missed its chance."[13] Here, Adorno neither supports nor rejects high modernism. Instead, he suggests that it should be used dialectically as the only possible standpoint for the critique of pseudo-culture. Adorno proposes the following "anachronism": "to hold to culture after society has deprived it of its foundation. The only possibility it will survive is found in the critical self-reflection on pseudo-culture for which culture is essential."[14] Culture can no longer be grounded on autonomous individuality. Yet one may not simply abandon culture since only through it can spirit become autonomous.

Adorno himself characterizes the standpoint for the critique of pseudo-culture as anachronistic. Gross's standpoint with respect to "anti-traditional"

10. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
12. Adorno, "Theorie der Halbbildung," *op. cit.*, p. 95ff.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

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societies is equally anachronistic. To use traditions and high culture against contemporary societies, however critically or dialectically, is to invoke the past against the present. Against Adorno, one could argue that today high modernism has lost much of its critical edge: it has itself been assimilated by pseudo-culture. For his part, Gross proposes a pre-modern stance ("pre-modern" because Gross believes modernity as a whole is anti-traditional). Spiritual and moral values from the past are used to defamiliarize problematic contemporary norms. But if, as both Adorno and Gross agree, one simply cannot turn back the clock and return to more traditional orientation horizons, the effectiveness of their approaches is questionable.

Gross's sweeping characterization of modernity as anti-traditional needs to be reassessed in light of his own claim that some traditions or elements of traditions have survived the evolution of the communities which once supported them into "more intricate social systems."[15] As Eisenstadt has pointed out, despite the fact that the "premises of universalism and equality" have undermined "the basis of legitimation found in historical or traditional societies," this does not mean that modern societies are without traditions: "It means, rather, that modernization has greatly weakened one specific aspect of traditionality — namely, the legitimation of social, political, and cultural orders in terms of some combination of 'pastness,' 'sacredness,' and their symbolic and structural derivatives. At the same time, however, modernization has given rise to the continuous reconstruction of other aspects of tradition, often as a response to the problems created by the breakdown of traditional legitimation of sociopolitical and cultural orders."[16] Accordingly, only certain elements of tradition have been enfeebled by the developments Gross describes, not tradition as a whole. (Therefore, one might wonder why Eisenstadt continues to characterize contemporary society as post-traditional.) Although Gross's definition of tradition — as that which purveys past practices and beliefs which have a certain moral or spiritual prestige and which link at least three generations, providing a sense of continuity — is in general agreement with Eisenstadt's, Gross fails to explore the loss of the moral or spiritual dimensions of these practices. His analysis is pursued on far too general and historical a level and his characterization of modernity as a whole as anti-traditional is symptomatic of this.

If not all elements of tradition have been lost, then Adorno's description of capitalist societies as essentially post-traditional is also suspect. A further problem with Adorno's position *vis à vis* tradition lies in his practical, if not theoretical conflation of tradition and traditional high culture such that tradition is often identical with major artworks from the past. Although he begins "On Tradition" by claiming that tradition's medium is the "pregiven, unreflected

15. Gross, *The Past in Ruins*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

16. S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Post-Traditional Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 6.

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and binding existence of social forms," he never elaborates on what these social forms might be. Instead, he concentrates on the second aspect of his definition: "the actuality of the past"[17] or historical continuity. In his analyses, historical continuity is traced not within social forms but often only within artistic techniques and forms. Thus Beckett himself only criticizes literary tradition and the post-traditional literary world. The effectiveness of this extremely self-reflective standpoint of high modernism for a critique of tradition and of post-traditional societies is therefore problematic.

Both Adorno and Gross also instrumentalize tradition, using it as an heuristic device for the critique of post or anti-traditional societies. Both therefore fall prey to their own criticisms concerning the instrumentalization of tradition. According to Adorno, modern societies methodically administer tradition "like an adhesive"[18] to hold the fraying social fabric together. Gross speaks critically of the use which the modern state and the mass media make of tradition. He also claims that "When the past is used as a kind of warehouse of potentially useful insights, it may seem that tradition is being honored. In fact it is not, for the sense of real continuity with the past, which needs to be present for a tradition to be authentic, is neither respected nor preserved when the past is approached in such a manner."[19] If "the loss of tradition in the demystification of the world ends . . . in the sclerosis of a spirit which adjusts itself to pure means and which is, at the outset, incompatible with culture,"[20] this loss will not be made good by turning tradition into a means for the critique of that spirit which adjusts itself to pure means. Such a use of tradition is symptomatic of the very state of affairs Adorno and Gross want to criticize.

Apart from their anachronistic thinking, their problematic positions concerning post or anti-traditional societies, and their instrumentalization of tradition, another problem arises for both Gross and Adorno: what critical leverage do their standpoints actually provide? Gross insists on the critical force of the reclamation of certain traditions or fragments thereof: they are supposed to provide critical leverage by virtue of their difference from anti-traditional modernity. But difference alone is not sufficient to legitimate the critical force of traditions. Gross needs to show that this particular form of difference actually has the shock value he claims for it. For his part, Adorno characterises the standpoint of high modernism as a kind of *pis aller*: there does not appear to be any other standpoint for critique apart from this highly problematic one. The possibility that critique might be more effective if one adopted the standpoint of the practical and particular experiences of, and struggles against, the loss of tradition is never considered by either Adorno or Gross. Critique is wielded from above: from the standpoint of the high modernist artist or from

17. Adorno, "On Tradition," *op. cit.*, p. 75.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
19. Gross, *The Past in Ruins*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
20. Adorno, "Theorie der Halbbildung," *op. cit.*, p. 105.

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an historico-critical perspective. Yet if the loss of important elements of tradition is lived in the form of crises within everyday life (which both Adorno and Gross believe), then the standpoint of the particular, local, and contextually specific lived experiences of and active resistance to the disintegration of substantive norms should also be explored.

Churches, therapeutic or self-help groups, and new age psychology, for example, are attempting to respond to some of the problems spawned in everyday life by the disintegration of relatively stable norms. Often in need of legitimation, the state also endeavors to respond to these crises by making use of tradition (thereby weakening whatever remains of it). Both Gross and Adorno criticize this exploitation. For Adorno, the state's instrumentalization is impotent and "contradicts the very essence of tradition."[21] Like Giddens, the state reduces tradition to a kind of psychological security blanket. For Gross, the exploitation of tradition by the state and the mass media amounts to the exploitation of the individual's perceived need for tradition in modern Western societies.

Adorno speaks of lived experience of atomization and fragmentation. He links the loss of tradition to the loss of historical consciousness — itself symptomatic of the fact that "people are experiencing the breakdown of temporal continuity."[22] In response to the disintegration of temporal continuity, people often take desperate measures. They may, for example, attempt to revive traditional practices and beliefs. But, for Adorno, such attempts are inimical to the pre-reflective dimension of tradition. Gross remarks that the state and the media recognize "that there also exists among people today . . . something that resembles a need for tradition." This need, however, gets subsumed "under the commodity form."[23] Real nostalgia for the past (which represents "an intense desire to return to some time or setting in the past that was more fulfilling; and . . . a tendency to idealize that earlier movement by selectively cystallizing its elements in such a way as to make it more attractive than it actually was") easily lends itself to commodification.[24]

Although vulnerable to such exploitation, the lived experience of the loss of tradition is real. For this reason, it might be useful to explore the normative frameworks of specific social groups or communities in order to determine what traditional elements have survived and the extent of their degradation owing to their instrumentalization by the state and the media, as well as to other factors. Understanding the ramifications of the perceived need for tradition is a precondition for satisfying it. Nonetheless, this need will not be satisfied by reviving traditions since, as Gross rightly points out, traditions now serve to defamiliarize the present. If revived, they would increase rather than diminish alienation because of their distance from the modern world. Indeed, nostalgia

21. Adorno, "On Tradition," *op. cit.*, p. 76.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Gross, *The Past in Ruins*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

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for tradition may express needs which traditions themselves can no longer satisfy, or which they would satisfy only indirectly.

Gross claims that nostalgia for tradition expresses the need for "security, continuity, and rootedness." Historically, it has been tradition which has satisfied these needs so that it would appear as if there is "a bona fide need for tradition."[25] The question concerning what needs are really being expressed in religious fundamentalism, neo-Nazi groups, and pop-psychological spiritual revivalism, for example, should be combined with an analysis of their critical thrust. Attempts to return to or revive tradition, or merely to keep it alive, represent, either implicitly or explicitly, critical standpoints against the loss of relatively stable normative frameworks. These endeavors should not be dismissed as simply pre-critical or naive. While they may be appropriated by particular political groups, which will likely destroy whatever traditions remain by politicizing and commodifying them, the attempt to live morally and spiritually fulfilling lives in the face of the sclerosis of the spirit is significant because it points to needs which modern societies have failed to satisfy.

The problem with theory is that it is often so far removed from everyday life that it fails to make use of what practical struggles against the loss of traditional norms may have to offer as a critical standpoint. The important question about the loss of substantive traditional frameworks (which demands more than a summary theoretical response) concerns the relevance of such frameworks for everyday life Although the value of returning to, or even of maintaining tradition is questionable, the needs which the loss of tradition has left unsatisfied demand new solutions.

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25. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

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Problems with Traditions

Robert D'Amico

In a famous anthropological study,[1] Robin Horton argues that a characteristic of traditional societies is what he calls the "closed predicament." The latter characterizes a society or tradition (in Horton's article he is discussing intellectual or religious traditions such as magic and mythology that involve explanations of natural phenomena and disease) in which alternative conceptual schemes are not known, certain beliefs are treated as sacred or immutable, and there is a pervasive "anxiety" in the society about the stability of the conceptual schemes. If the society's practices and rituals are subjected to criticism they will erode. This "anxiety" is not fully conscious but is manifested, Horton hypothesizes, in such social mechanisms as "taboos." Furthermore, these kinds of intellectual traditions do not develop universal norms of reasoning, criticism and analysis. Hence, as Horton concludes, "established beliefs have an absolute validity, and any threat to such beliefs is a horrific threat of chaos. Who is going to jump from the cosmic palm-tree when there is no hope of another perch to swing to?"[2]

Horton was influenced by Karl Popper's reply to Michael Oakeshott's attack on modernism.[3] Oakeshott saw the advocate of modern reason as "the *enemy* of authority, of prejudice, of the merely traditional, customary or habitual. . . . there is no opinion, no habit, no belief, nothing so firmly rooted or so widely held that he hesitates to question it and to judge it by what he calls his 'reason'; . . . . He has no sense of the cumulation of experience, only of the readiness of experience when it has been converted into a formula: the past is significant to him only as an encumbrance." Oakeshott's conclusion is that rationalism becomes an ideology and the Rationalist adopts "a deep distrust of time, an impatient hunger for eternity and an irritable nervousness in the face of everything topical and transitory."[4] Oakeshott is part of Burkean impulse in political

1. Robin Horton, "African Thought and Western Science," in Bryan R. Wilson, ed., *Rationality* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 131-171.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

3. Karl Popper, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition," in *Conjectures and Refutations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), pp. 120-135. Michael Oakeshott, "Rationalism in Politics," in *Rationalism in Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1962). Oakshott's essay originally appeared in *The Cambridge Journal* in 1947 and Popper's dates from 1949.

4. Oakeshott, pp. 2-3. A similar theme can be found in Sumner's 1906 Darwinian sociology of manners published in 1906. "The tradition is its own warrant. It is not

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thought because he fears the overwhelming damage to the fragile and intricate ecology of mores, habits, rituals, and ways of life that sustain social life by the effort to subject society to scientific, rational or even critical study. Here Popper's defense of the critical attitude toward tradition against both the kind of rationalism Oakeshott condemns and the traditionalism he offers in return is basically the right strategy. I cite this debate as an introduction and context for David Gross' recent attempt to, in effect, combine Horton and Oakeshott. Gross agrees that a certain kind of rationalism has eroded the patterns of social life that give it value and stability. Nevertheless, he wants to preserve autonomy, individuality and "critical leverage."

The Past in Ruins is a beautifully clear, evocative, penetrating, and persuasive attempt to shift the debate concerning modern and traditional societies. Gross states: "Now once again it seems that a kind of liberation is needed, but this time a liberation from the worst aspects of modernity *while paradoxically remaining within the framework of modernity*. I believe that in order to achieve this objective, a recuperation of tradition is required to lift us out of immediacy and give us greater critical leverage."[5] The recurring theme of Gross' study is that the state, the market economy and sphere of popular culture erode personal autonomy to an extent far beyond what traditions exercised over personal autonomy in pre-modern societies. "Today the balance of forces between the state or market on the one hand and the individual on the other, appears to be more unequal than it has ever been. Hence it seems that there will be a greater need for people to devise ways of coping with situations which they have not had a hand in shaping and which often militate against their own best interests."[6]

There has been a shift in the balance of power in the modern age. "At least throughout much of the past one tradition could be counterpoised to another, thereby preventing any from holding absolute sway. Today, however, such a strategy of balance is difficult to achieve, since we have on hand very few defenses against the forces of administration and manipulation that have their source *outside* the old traditions, and which seem bent on destroying what those traditions represent. Though we might appear to be freer than our forbearers, we may now actually be more vulnerable to a host of new and more effective political and economic determinations."[7] Gross assumes, then, that if what we want is a social world in which the achievement of personal autonomy

held subject to verification by experience. The notion of right is in the folkways. It is outside of them, of independent origin, and brought to them to test them. In folkways, whatever is, is right. This is because they are traditional, and therefore contain in themselves the authority of the ancestral ghosts. When we come to the folkways we are at the end of our analysis." William Graham Sumner, *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores and Morals* (New York: Ginn and Company, 1940).

5. David Gross, *The Past in Ruins* (Amherst, New York: University of Massachussetts Press, 1992), p. 157.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 229-230.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

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is possible we must shift our strategy to preserve the realm of tradition against the realm of commerce which creates; "the problems of rationalization, commodification and instrumentalization, the erosion of the lifeworld, the growing manipulation of consensus, the atomization of experience, and the disintegration of individual autonomy and subjectivity."[8] No longer are we engaged in a project of freeing the modernist impulse from the archaic structures of traditional life, but in protecting the individual from the result of the modernist impulse itself. Thus paradoxically the precondition for fundamental social reorganization and the possibility of meaningful social relations is a "critical" return to traditions.

Gross grants that there is no returning to traditional societies *per se*, nor any way in which we can pretend to become so naive once again that we view our social roles as fixed natures or the immutable conceptual schemes of Horton's traditional magicians and diviners. Having realized that there are alternatives, the spell has been cast and society is forever marked by that experience. Perhaps this is what Adorno meant by saying that our concepts are historically cursed.

I find the overall strategy and some specific analyses in Gross' study convincing. However, I am not convinced that if we take seriously the role of tradition in social life that the very enterprise of either critical theory or social change conceived as a systematic rejection of the state, market and culture industry will survive. Nor am I convinced by Gross' account of the level of control exercised by commercial culture. I think the questions Gross has raised push far beyond the type of social analysis he offers.

It is characteristic of the critical theory of society to fixate on the theme of totalistic control, even if such control is buried in advertisement, popular music and the desires of consumers. The leitmotif of Critical Theory is that modern society is deeply authoritarian and repressive precisely where it appears most liberating and free. This deep dimension of authority can never be reformed or removed. Hence liberalism cannot transform or humanize modern society completely and the presence of this deep repression will continue to fuel anti-capitalist and anti-industrialist sentiments, no matter how much the standard of living improves. The impulse to change society under these conditions, however, most often manifests itself in the convenient form of reactionary emotional sentiments in favor of further repression and control. Hence even the impulse to resist totalistic control is managed.

Without this pattern of analysis Critical Theory would have to either embrace liberalism or return to the orthodox Marxist account in which modern society, without socialist organization of production, does lower the standard of living of its population. While the second option became more and more untenable on direct empirical grounds, the first continued to appear to the adherents of Critical Theory as the death of serious political philosophy. Thus the particularity of Critical Theory's position on modernization, as Gross states it

8. *Ibid.*, p.159.

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always stands between romantic anti-capitalism and liberalism. Romantic anti-capitalism rejects the impact of market relations in the name of some ideals of the pre-modern past and, as Gross adds, "holding up as exemplary much that should be deplored." Liberalism, on the other hand, remains confident that market relations introduce a rational procedure for both allocating resources and distributing goods, a procedure far preferable to such distributive mechanisms as birth order, caste system, caprice of nature, or divinity; namely those strategies incarnated in the power of traditional bases of authority for which nostalgia conceals abuse. Critical Theory, in contrast, worries about instrumentalization as much as magic; it hopes for a third attitude which resists integration either at the level of productive organization or at the level of the social production of emotional life.

But classical liberalism was neither unaware nor uncritical of the problems of productive expansion or tradition, at least during its flowering in the 19th century. For example, in John Stuart Mill's brilliant 1831 essay "The Spirit of the Age,"[9] he describes his historical moment as one in which: "mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones." Yet he is not an uncritical observer of modernism: "The grand achievement of the present age is the diffusion of superficial knowledge." He also draws an insightful contrast between an unthinking modernism and traditionalism. "The men of the past are those who continue to insist upon our still adhering to the blind guide. The men of the present are those who bid each man look about for himself, with or without the promise of spectacles to assist him. . . . I differ from those, who seeing the institutions of our ancestors to be bad for us, imagine that they were bad for those for whom they were made, and from those who ridiculously invoke the wisdom of our ancestors as authority for institutions which in substance are now totally different, howsoever they may be the same in form."

In spite of Mill's recognition that power has remained unchanged since the Middle Ages, "namely the possession of wealth or the being employed and trusted by the wealthy," the critical potential implicit in his project was eclipsed by an obscure German immigrant and contemporary of Mill who announced that "the weight of dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living." Having digested Malthus and Ricardo and seen the effects of early capitalist industrialization and accumulation, Marx concluded that even the most violent upheaval would be compensated for by the results of humanizing this juggernaut of profit-maximization and human degradation. He further held that the struggle to maintain this society against such change would be in part carried on in the culture and its ideas. Hence for Marx all culture, except that of the yet to be liberated working class, functioned like a traditional culture, perpetuating and reinforcing patterns of life that maintained privilege and hierarchy. But

9. Republished in *Essays on Politics and Culture*. Edited and Introduced by Gertrude Himmelfarb (New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 2-10.

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the historical moment of that conclusion passed long before Marx died. Industrialization was constrained neither by Malthus' theory of population (Malthus already realized this point in the second edition of his famous essay and consequently heavily qualified his infamous dire predictions of immiseration) nor by Ricardo's iron law of wages. The adaptability and flexibility of market mechanisms and industrial policies was simply much greater than any of these early theorists imagined, and the amelioration of abuses inherent in primitive accumulation were also possible without the expected crises in productivity or decline in profits. Finally, the purely functional picture of culture which only perpetuates and sustains existing social relations was proving profoundly misleading. Marx, for all his supposed deep criticism of the assumptions of classical political economy, was in many ways a greater "dupe" of that discourse and its deepest assumptions, especially in its functional view of cultural organization, than Mill who remained suspicious of deriving social analysis directly from economic theories which claimed to deduce the future by concepts. The dismissal of any other view of capitalist development than an apocalyptic one and any other picture of markets than soul destroying practices is not just an hysterical misreading of modernism but a potentially lethal politics.

But the influence of Marx remains vibrant in Gross' study and many of the book's central themes are fueled by this distrust of the market detected as the source of all social problems. Gross asserts that under market economies the relation of production and need is distorted and made uncontrollable by the intervention of exchange value. The whole economy becomes a natural force and all human needs and activities are only so much exchange value. Hence the life of tradition is destroyed by this social formation and thus the rehabilitation of tradition is in some sense a repudiation of this economic juggernaut once again. I want to raise three objections to Gross' book that also raise doubts about his central distinction between "naturally surviving traditions" and "artificially sustained traditions."

First, the very concept of tradition needs more examination. Gross leaves the term implicit and offers instead a myriad of exemplifications. He mentions "powerful religious, racial and patriarchical traditions of the past." He notes at different points "neighborliness" as a tradition, "rural gatherings" in studies of French peasantry, the universities, revolutionary movements, secret sects, trade unions, and patriotism. The lists run from practices, to institutions to ideas. What is identified as anti-traditional is the state, the market and the culture industry, as well as certain strategies such as commercialization, iconography, and economic exchange, which are described as those that destroy, manipulate or distort traditions. But this approach is not coherent. There is no reason given as to why a market, which is handed down and passed on and constitutes part of a way of life or social practice is not a tradition while a religious ceremony is. Furthermore, the distinction between natural and artificial traditions, which tries to supplement this lack of a reason for denying that certain social practices

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are traditions, is not itself defensible since the ability to decide what is "artificially" rather than naturally sustained is dependent on Gross already having decided that a given practice is not a tradition. Thus anything that the market sustains and passes on is by definition artificially perpetuated.

The distinction needed here is between the way of life or social practice and its conceptual elaboration. "Tradition in short is taught by action, not by idea or principle."[10] Thus some of Gross' examples, such as religions, are both practices and conceptual schemes whereas others, such as friendliness or gatherings, normally have little or no conceptual elaboration. What then appears characteristic of traditional societies is that the social practice dominates the conceptual elaboration, as Horton showed in his studies of magic and ritual. What Gross requires is not a distinction between what is a tradition and what is not, which appears more and more problematic, but one between social practices and the growth of self-conscious conceptual elaboration about those practices characteristic of modern societies and the "critical attitude."

Second, I turn to Gross' attack on the market economy. A return to non-market social organization is always possible, and Gross is correct to say that the remnants of such practices remain in the interstices of contemporary social life.[11] But in spite of some spirited defenses of such mechanisms in recent years, these procedures remain notoriously inadequate at both the level of justifying the resulting distribution of goods or in realizing the productive level that makes projects of social change viable. The idea of a third option, which somehow combines the productivity of the market and the meaningful identity and integration of the community, is at this point mostly a verbal invention. Gross' vision is that the very core of modernism can be dismantled, namely its organization of productive and economic activity, and yet a new society can retain autonomous individuals embedded in strong communities. For this reason

10. Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 77. "A tradition, in its simplest form, may be thought of as an indefinite series of repetitions of an action, which on each occasion is performed on the assumption that it has been performed before; its performance is authorized — though the nature of authorization may vary widely — by the knowledge, or the assumption, of previous performance . . . Traditions of this kind, then, are immemorial, and they are prescriptive and presumptive; and this was pointed out by Burke . . . we are concerned less with tradition as an objective fact, a necessary mode of social life, than with the conceptualization of tradition, with what happens when a society forms an image of itself as a constant transmission of ways of living and behaving . . ." J. G. A. Pocock, "Time, Institutions and Understanding" in Preston King, ed., *Politics and Experience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 212-213.

11. A number of social theorists have been influenced by anthropological studies of non-economic exchange. The classic statement here is Marcel Maus, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Society* (New York: Norton Librairy, 1967). Two examples, one practical and one metaphysical, of elaborating the possibilities for symbolic or non-commercial exchange are Richard Titmus, *The Gift Relationship: From Human Blood to Social Policy* (New York: Pantheon, 1971) and George Bataille, *La Part Maudite* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967).

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he directs his analysis not at economic conditions necessary for such traditional patterns of life but at the dismantling of the "culture industry." The reason for this shift is that the blame for deteriorating autonomy is now laid upon institutions that produce what Mill called "a multitude without a guide" susceptible to sophism, superstition and salesmen. Yet Gross, following the tradition of Critical Theory, vastly overestimates the level of control, centralization and success of the culture industry.

Finally, related to the above point, Gross makes the following argument at the end of his book. "Today one can point to a number of enduring traditions which perpetuate bigotry and intolerance. If an individual were to insinuate himself into such traditions he would become, by virtually any standard of measurement, shallower and more narrow minded as a result. On the other hand, there are also traditions which appear to broaden the individual . . . Nevertheless the question of how to evaluate a tradition is a difficult one. In the final analysis, each individual may have to develop his or her own criteria of judgement . . ."[12] I do not think this argument or the criteria that Gross goes on to offer ("Does the tradition contain an element of truth which would be irretrievably lost if the tradition did not survive?") is very persuasive. First, he does not seriously consider whether a more traditional society would weaken precisely the kind of individuality presupposed in such a choice. Second, making choices about what tradition to adhere to is already to be in a radically non-traditional society. If, as I suggest above, Gross' distinction between artificial and natural traditions is unfounded, then it is not clear how the "refunctioning" of tradition provides a "critical leverage" for answering the question of how to choose a way of life or social practice. Gross' apparent answer is unusually elusive. "These remarks should make clear what I think the value of otherness is, especially the otherness represented by tradition. We need to recuperate past traditions not in order to restore a previous set of norms, as traditionalism tries to do, nor in order to impose new forms of social integration, which tradition is now incapable of achieving in any case, but in order to gain access to what might be called the *unheimisch*."[13]

What Gross is suggesting is that there may be reasons for preferring that societies have certain kinds of patterns of life because it makes its members more resilient, less manipulable by the culture industry and less shallow. But the critical attitude is the ever present option of asking for justifications or reasons for social practices and it requires reflection on the nature of standards and values. The problem is that traditions in themselves do not provide any more justification other than the bare fact of their existence.

Hegel posed this question in his attack on the purely historical study of law. "A particular law may be shown to be wholly grounded in and consistent with the circumstances and with existing legally established institutions, and yet it

12. *The Past in Ruins*, p. 231.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

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may be wrong and irrational in its essential character, like a number of provisions in Roman private law which followed quite logically from such institutions as Roman matrimony and Roman *patria potestas*."[14] The distinction Hegel struggles to express in his vocabulary is between explanation and justification, between intuition and criticism. It is a pertinent insight. A way of life or social practice may intuitively feel "right" in a society simply because of how it functions. The explanation of that practice is in part an account of its function. But that alone does not justify a way of life. Justification is a separate question. Gross' book appears to be offering individuals reasons for the justification of traditions and traditional practices. But lacking both a concept of tradition and an account of justification, other than leaving the issue to the choice of individuals who have gained access to the *unheimisch*, the book seems both incomplete and evasive.

14. G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 17.

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Tradition and the Critical Talent

John Michael

Tradition and/as Modernity

From Montaigne to Edmund Burke to Matthew Arnold and William Bennett, tradition has been the special weapon of conservative critics attacking modernity and reform. In a further sign, if one were needed, that old intellectual and political oppositions are in flux, tradition has lately reappeared in a different guise especially among intellectuals on the "Left."[1] In *The Past in Ruins* David Gross attempts to formalize this conceptual reorientation by reintroducing tradition not primarily as an object for critical analysis but as a potential grounding for critical opposition to the dominant culture. His work introduces but does not quite answer the crucial question of tradition's place in a society where heterogeneity and division rather than homogeneity and unity are the rule.

Though Gross rejects the reactionary position whose adherents call for the restoration of tradition to contemporary society "as much as is humanly possible,"(4) he shares the fundamental view of both tradition and modernity that legitimates this position. Gross believes that the attenuation of tradition deprives modern life of meaning, thereby exposing individuals to manipulation by modernity's unholy trinity: the state, the market, and the culture industry.[2] The

1. Anthony Giddens suggests that in contemporary Western society the emergence of what he calls life-style politics, centered on questions of identity and relation rather than emancipation, "brings back to prominence precisely those moral and existential questions repressed by the core institutions of modernity" and calls this phenomena "the return of the institutionally repressed." See *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 223-24. See also Alisdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980); and *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) who argues for a similar remoralization of contemporary social discourse from a more explicitly conservative position. The return of tradition in Left discussions functions like the return of the repressed. There is something simultaneously scandalous and familiar about it.

2. Gross explicitly rejects the notion that modern society is traditionless. As he puts it later in the book: "Wherever there is enculturation or socialization there is some element of tradition, and wherever there is a store of background information that people draw upon as tacit knowledge, some amount of tradition is present. What has perhaps been defeated is tradition as social cement, since it is true that tradition no longer holds social life together as it once did." (63) I doubt that tradition ever did or ever could be capable of providing social cement for a society that was not already homogeneous. Where the homogeneity of society has become questionable (and it has been in

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waning of tradition, which provided the "social cement" that held society together, makes the social order vulnerable to new forms of domination which are the unifying and homogenizing forces of modernity itself. Thus a bad homogeneity, determined by the forces of modernity, supplants a good homogenous order, rooted in tradition.

Against this bad homogeneity, Gross urges a "refunctioning of tradition." Knowledge of traditions can afford critical alternatives to "bureaucratic organization, consumer capitalism, and media culture." (5) But this refunctioning of tradition in opposition to modernity is at last compromised by its reliance on the view of tradition and its role in society that underpins the reactionary agenda he rejects. For Gross assumes tradition to have been the grounds for a wholeness of life and a plenitude of meaning that modernity has supplanted. "Tradition has been central to human life for millennia. Its main function has been to provide the values, beliefs, and guidelines for conduct that have helped mold communities into organic wholes. . . . Without it there would have been no effective social integration, nor any connecting tissue holding together, in Edmund Burke's words, 'those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are [yet] to be born'." (3). The argument is familiar, though it will bear little scrutiny. This can only be a vision of a paradise lost. Tradition can only be imagined to have functioned as society's organic glue by critics reflecting on it after its functioning as second nature has ceased, after it has been named and made self-conscious, after the whole way of life that it organically determined has changed. In the endemic "before," tradition as a second nature could not have known itself. The French Revolution gave urgency to Burke's programmatic conservatism for it made the traditions of the *ancien regime* visible even as it sought to destroy them. For the traditionalist, the past is always in ruins. For if tradition becomes knowledge through modernity's critical intervention, then traditions are known only when they are already fatally compromised and have already ceased to function as primary providers of human meaning or chief purveyors of social cement. Modernity's view of tradition is characterized by a certain evacuating circularity that is evident in Gross' argument as well.

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question for a very long time), tradition is the name of either a utopian dream or of a polemical strategy often instrumentalized or deployed by one faction of society against or in resistance to another. "Tradition," then, is not a response to but an expression of the conflicts characteristic of modern society. For all traditions, to use a phrase Gross uses, in so far as they are labelled traditions and made available for cognition, are "artificially sustained." (64) The interiority of tradition, as Adorno points out, is unconscious and therefore, from the viewpoint of modernity, also invisible. Gross offers a promising glimpse of a model for traditional society in which heterogeneity and not the homogeneity of modernity's dreams and nightmares might be the rule. He writes: "throughout much of the past one tradition could be counterpoised to another, thereby preventing any from holding absolute sway. Today, however, such a strategy of balance is difficult to achieve, . . ." (5) And yet, if contemporary society is marked not only by a heterogeneity of peoples but also by a heterogeneity of traditions, then such a balance is precisely one thing that criticism may find itself constrained to achieve.

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Tradition and modernity are usually seen as mutually exclusive. Modernity's hostility to tradition is its distinguishing characteristic. According to Giddens, modernity is defined by contrast: "modernity is a post-traditional order."[3] In the opposition between modernity and tradition, modernity comes to know itself through its own critical knowledge of tradition. When Gross says of traditionalism that it only exists within modernity by defining itself "in relation to what it opposes," he describes a dynamic that is also true of modernity (79). Modernity can only define itself in opposition to the traditional, which it also defines, producing itself while producing its other. This opposition obscures a more fundamental similarity. Both modernity and the traditional represent a certain modern dream of an homogenous social order, united by a single principle. Whether that unifying principle be the administrative equality of a rationalized bureaucracy or the organic unity of a traditional mode of life, the dream of homogeneity within a single society or community remains the same. And it is this dream of homogeneity, which on this fundamental level makes the dreams of modernity and modernity's dream of tradition one, that must be criticized. Can tradition or the traditions of modernity be conceived in a social context in which heterogeneity is the inescapable condition of life? What role can critique, and the particular modern class of intellectuals who practice it play in such a context?[4]

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3. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 2.

4. Left theory was to have produced a similar coherence by overcoming the parochialism and fragmentation of traditional ways of thinking. Gramsci expressed the hopes of modernity in his formulation of philosophy as critical consciousness: "In acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. . . . The personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over. To criticize one's own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world. It therefore also means criticism of all previous philosophy, in so far as this has left stratified deposits in popular philosophy. . . . For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world is a 'philosophical' event far more important and 'original' than the discovery by some philosophical 'genius' of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals." See "The Study of Philosophy" in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, eds., *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), pp. 324-25. Gramsci's modernizing project of rendering traditional modes of thought transparent through critical reason has, as its end, the same goal as the traditionalist's uncritical reclamation of the past, the achievement of coherence and unity in society. But if the belief in critical reason is itself revealed to be "prejudice" pertaining to one of the specific and local "phases of history," and if the achievement of a "human race united the world over" is exposed as an imperialist fantasy, then what is left of the critical project? What if a certain incoherence and disunity represents what Gramsci calls the starting point of philosophy in "what one really is"?

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Gross remarks that the Enlightenment was "the first uncompromisingly antitraditional movement in modern Europe" (35).[5] It was also the defining moment of Europe's modernity. Critical reason sought either to demolish traditional forms of belief or to reestablish those beliefs on its own grounds. From Descartes' *Meditations*, through Locke's *Second Treatise*, *The Declaration of the Rights of Man*, *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, *The Communist Manifesto* and beyond, enlightened polemicists claimed reason's light as a critical weapon in the struggle to emancipate people from the oppressive dominance of the past. In the Western tradition, while the links between emancipatory politics and critical reason are complex and vexed they are also well-forged and durable. Nietzsche and Foucault, who implicate both reason and enlightenment in modernity's ever more efficient structures of domination and oppression, do not break with the traditions of modern criticism. They merely introduce a necessary permutation in its project.

Stripped of its pretensions to universality and to reason as neutral or objective quantities, modernity emerges from and constitutes a mode of thinking that is possessed of and by its own traditions. It pertains, as traditions do, to specific cultural identities in particular geographic locals. At this late date, the observation that modernity originates in and has special relevance to the cultural history of Europe and Euro-America is no news. Yet we must remember that the coincidence between geography and culture is questionable at best. It is not enough to limit the consideration of modernity and tradition to what Gross calls, "the part of the world I know best, namely the industrialized West (Europe and the US) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." (6) For the legacy of colonialism, along with other economic, social, and political developments of the last two hundred years, assures that within those regions of the world most apparently familiar to Euro-American intellectuals, the peoples and traditions of many less familiar parts of the world have long been dwelling. The heterogeneity of modern societies makes the reassessment of the place and function of critique in those societies particularly urgent. If criticism remains the quintessential intellectual activity in the modern tradition, we must ask how it can function if the universalizing claims of modernity and of reason are no longer tenable even within the Euro-American societies modernity was once thought to define.

Perhaps we should ask whether the functional equation between traditional forms, coherent meanings, and social cement is not itself a modernist myth rather than a reliable characterization of traditional society. Criticism requires a reorientation with regard to tradition on this most basic level. For if tradition is assumed to pertain to a lost wholeness of life in societies where homogeneity and stability are the rule, then it can have little to offer which, despite the critical theorist's nightmare of a totally administered society, seems to be characterized

5. See, for example, Kant's well-known essay, "What is Enlightenment?" in Peter Gay, ed., *The Enlightenment: A Comprehensive Anthology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

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by an increasing demographic heterogeneity and by rapid transformations in the organization of production and life.

This essential heterogeneity of modern society has been most symptomatically apparent in the debates about multiculturalism. The specter of an increasingly heterogeneous US haunts the neoconservative imagination. Dinesh D'Souza, one of the best-known neoconservative voices, would address this problem through the institution of a single, unifying tradition in US schools and universities.[6] This is a modernist, administrative solution. It is also a traditional solution. For the history of the modern humanities in US universities has often involved a perceived need for a unifying tradition to instill a universal and coherent national identity on a desperately heterogeneous population.[7] One notable error that D'Souza and other "cultural conservatives" commit, in addition to the essentializing and racist equation of pigmentation and culture, is the even more racist assumption that the "yellow, black, and brown" faces peopling the US are recent arrivals and that America's predominately white stamp was ever anything but an imposition by the dominant Euro-American race and culture, an imposition meant to stamp out an irreducible cultural and racial heterogeneity that is, like the history of its exclusion from the common historical consciousness, part of the history of the US. Any attempt to refunction tradition for this society must take this attempt to exclude its fundamental heterogeneity from the dominant ideology into account.

While Gross would not subscribe to D'Souza's conservative cultural agenda, his use of tradition as a globalizing term to describe the present crisis shares crucial if unacknowledged assumptions with programmatic traditionalism's administrative program. Rather than assigning tradition a primary and unverifiable role in furnishing social cohesion, we should imagine traditions playing a variety of roles in the heterogenous constitution of a whole way of

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6. In *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), pp. 13-14, Dinesh D'souza writes: "America is very rapidly becoming a multiracial, multicultural society. Immigration from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean has changed the landscape with an array of yellow, brown, and black faces. Meanwhile, European immigration has shrunk from 50 percent of all arrivals between 1955 and 1964 to around 7 percent between 1975 and the present. The recolorization of America is further enhanced by domestic minority birth rates, which exceed that of whites. The result is a new diversity of pigments and lifestyles. When America loses her predominantly white stamp, what impact will that have on her Western cultural traditions? On what terms will the evanescent majority and the emerging minorities, both foreign and domestic, relate to each other? How should society cope with the agenda of increasingly powerful minority groups, which claim to speak for blacks, Hispanics, women and homosexuals? These challenges are currently being faced by the leadership of institutions of higher education."

7. See Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987). Graff also argues that as instruments of ideological indoctrination, US schools and universities have been notably inefficient in instilling any single perspective, though the exclusions forced by the narrowest definition of the canon have had major ideological effects (pp. 13-14).

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social life in both the present and the past. If tradition as the primary purveyor of social cohesion in homogeneous societies is a modern myth, then the relevance of traditions to American society where heterogeneity and instability have long been the rule and where the heterogeneity of traditions may already be playing an important role remains an open question. Thus the problem of tradition for the Left may have less to do with tradition itself than with the vision of a homogeneous society that the critic of tradition assumes. Where does the myth of this homogeneity, so obviously at odds with both history and experience, originate and what keeps it current?

Tradition and Society: Defrocking the Clerisy

Gross' argument evokes, even as it resists it, a familiar modernist view of history, society, and tradition. In this view tradition guarantees a reliable homogeneity in the social order. Yet the organic trappings of this myth mask the presence of a certain heterogeneity — something inorganic — in the social order imagined. We may explore this view in the social criticism of T. S. Eliot. That Gross' evocation of a past in ruins evokes Eliot's well-known line from *The Waste Land* is appropriate, for Eliot, like Gross, attempted to employ the fragments of the past to stave off the ruin of the present. He exemplifies the genealogy of modern reflection on the traditional.

Eliot mounted one of this century's most trenchant challenges to modernity.[8]

8. Eliot's criticism of mass society in the absence of traditions coincides with Gross'. In 1939 Eliot wrote: "The tendency of unlimited industrialism is to create bodies of men and women — of all classes — detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. And a mob will be no less a mob if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed, and well disciplined." "The Idea of a Christian Society," in *The Idea of a Christian Society and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 53. As James Longenbach has argued, the famous line from "The Waste Land," "These fragments I have shored against my ruin," the line which reverberates in Gross' title and in his view of tradition, grows out of a romantic historiography, associated with Dilthey, Croce, and Nietzsche, in which the significance of the past depends upon its intertwinement with and determination in the present. Thus the fragments of history and of the literary European traditions with which Eliot's poetry is strewn are meant not to evacuate but to deepen the significance of the present. If that present is seen as a time of crisis, then it is the perspective of tradition that allows one the criterion to measure the depth of that crisis. The best exposition of those early beliefs about history and their relation to idealist philosophy, hermeneutics, and romantic historiography may be found in James Longenbach, *Modernist Poetics of History: Pound, Eliot and the Sense of the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 3-28 and 152-238. Tradition affords one, as Gross would have it, a critical perspective on the modern world.

Yet Gross misunderstands the character of literary modernism and its relation to history and tradition. When he cites Pound's phrase, "make it new!" as the negation of tradition he misses the profoundly anxious engagement with and desire to recuperate traditions that motivated modernists and especially the poetic and cultural theories of Pound and Eliot. As Eric Sigg points out, the expatriation of Pound and Eliot was a response to a perceived absence of tradition in the New World and the conviction that art and culture were impossible without it. "The genteel writers wanted European art in

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While he once sympathized with crypto-fascist movements such as Charles Maurras' *Action Francaise* in the late 1920s and early 1930s, unlike some other modernists, Eliot was ultimately repelled by fascism's brutality and vulgarity.[9] Moreover, Eliot's criticism of modern liberalism and the most complacent forms of conservatism influenced later New Left cultural critics, most notably Raymond Williams, whose fruitful definition of culture as "a whole way of life" adapts Eliot's definition of tradition to new ends.[10] Eliot believed that traditions constitute the organic basis of social life. He also believed that a society functions best when its most important traditions are grounded in the Christian community. He thus self-consciously extends the analysis of modern society that begins with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Church and State*. This conservative tradition sheds light on the place of the traditional in contemporary society. The relation between tradition and community may be less organic than the traditional critic imagines. For clearly visible in the light of this conservative critical tradition is the shadow that the intellectual, the assumed embodiment or incorporation of critical reason, casts over the society he depicts. The same shadowy figure obscures Gross' vision of society.

Eliot and Coleridge agree that an organic community, grounded in a single coherent tradition, requires guarantors of the authenticity and orthodoxy of that tradition.[11] Thus a certain recognizably modern division of labor seems

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America. Their modernist offspring determined that if they could not have art in America, they would have art without it." Eric Sigg, *The American T. S. Eliot: a Study of the Early Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 149. Certainly many characteristically modernist productions, ranging from Proust through Pound, Eliot, and Williams demonstrate an obsessive interest in the recuperation and recovery of tradition.

Eliot would certainly not have recognized the modernity he practiced in Gross' characterization of an aesthetic in which "Originality or creativity . . . came through a spontaneous interaction with immediacy," which is closer to a caricatured version of romanticism against which Eliot and Pound reacted. The last sentence of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" typifies modernist aesthetics: "The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living." *The Sacred Wood* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1921) p. 53. See Gregory S. Jay, *T. S. Eliot and the Poetics of Literary History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), and John Paul Riquelme, *Harmony of Dissonances: T. S. Eliot. Romanticism. and Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

9. William M. Chace, *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973). See also David Edwards, "Introduction" to T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 11-23.

10. Raymond Williams' formulation of culture as a "whole way of life," derives from Eliot's definition of religion, tradition and culture not as "merely the sum of several activities, but a *way of life*." T. S. Eliot, *Notes Toward a Definition of Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 41. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 232.

11. Many identifiable "traditions" are invented in the manner that Gross describes the modern state's invention of traditions, "out of false memories of the past which are imposed on the life world from the top down."(71) This is not to say that all traditions

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to be part of the traditional order. In Coleridge's terms, the traditional order requires a "Clerisy."[12] The point is not that tradition and culture are now merely pretexts for a disciplinary state apparatus, though they have often legitimated

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are simply spurious, nor that there is no difference in the perspectives afforded by tradition and modernity. It means that tradition has often been most effective when appropriated, reified, and instrumentalized by powerful institutions. An investigation of this phenomena requires criteria and categories more nuanced and supple than those that rest upon a simple distinction between pseudo and authentic traditions that Gross evokes (76). One does not have to be resolutely anti-traditional to admit, as Gross does, that authenticity, however one might define it, does not guarantee that the meanings and forms of life associated with or legitimated by the evocation of a certain tradition will be politically tenable or morally tolerable. Traditions themselves must be judged by criteria that may or may not be traditional. But before judging traditions, we need a clearer view of what is claimed for tradition. Here Gross' argument is exemplary of tradition's promises, even as it is also indicative of its problems.

12. On the influence of Coleridge's book on modernist thinkers about tradition and society as diverse as T. S. Eliot and Raymond Williams, see Colmer's introduction to "On the Constitution of the Church and State" in John Colmer, ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) Vol. 10, p. lxvii. Coleridge, a prototype for all modernist speculation and anxiety about the relation between tradition and community, specifies certain forms of intellectual labor to be essential for the maintenance of traditions and the organic functioning of community. Universities, the Pastorate, and the parish schools stand as the primary institutions of this clerisy. He specifies that these should each "be working to the same end, and determined in the choice of their means and the direction of their labours, by one and same object — namely in producing and re-producing, in preserving, continuing and perfecting, the necessary sources and conditions of national civilizations — this being itself an indispensable condition of national safety, power and welfare. . . ." Coleridge goes on to specify the purpose of these "*Cleri doctores ut Clerus Populi*." "I may," he writes, "be allowed, therefore, to express the final cause of the whole by the office and purpose of the greater part — and this is, to form and train up the people of the country to obedient, free, useful, organizable subjects, citizens, and patriots, living to the benefit of the state, and prepared to die for its defense. The proper object and end of the National Church is civilization with freedom . . . [this object] would be fulfilled in the communication of that degree and kind of knowledge to all, the possession of which is necessary for all in order to their CIVILITY. By civility I mean all the qualities essential to a citizen, and devoid of which no people or class of the people can be calculated on by the rulers and leaders of the state for the conservation or promotion of its essential interests." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On the Constitution of the Church and State," *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54. Thus, it does not seem historically accurate to claim, with Gross, that through schools in emergent nations "the state increasingly eliminated the need for tradition" (45) since many hoped that schools would provide the means for transmitting those traditions on which the state itself appeared to rely for its coherence and legitimation. Elsewhere Gross points out that nationalism often depended on the "reassembling and reinterpreting" of preexistent traditions to achieve its force (46-47). On this, see also Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Gross, however, claims that the state and capitalism tend to deploy "brilliantly conceived simulacra of some of the very traditions" being destroyed (47). It would, of course, be the intellectuals' task to discriminate between an organic tradition and a synthetic simulacra. Gross has little to say about how that is to be done.

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such impositions. The point is that the problem of tradition often appears most urgently to intellectuals who are, as were Coleridge and Eliot, identified with particular centers of power. No appeal to tradition or the meanings it supplies should be thought to be neutral or innocent. Appeals to tradition tend to implicate political structures and power relations, though their mode of implication may vary. This is true when traditions are seen to offer a coherent foundation for society and culture, as in Coleridge's or Eliot's appeal to an existing national institution like the established Church and the single community of believers its officers and auxiliaries represented. It is also true when, as Gross would put it, the past is seen to be in ruins. For implicit in both is a vision of and nostalgia for the wholeness of a way of life that may never have existed. It is this vision that has often implicated traditionalists in racist policies. But does that mean that traditions can have no place in such a society? And if modernity itself is a certain Western tradition, then what can that mean?

Tradition itself is not the problem. It is rather the intellectual's dream of grounding a coherent society on a traditional orthodoxy defined and protected by a clerisy of intellectuals that must be reassessed. While Eliot was, as Raymond Williams and others have noted, blind to the complexities of the British society he inhabited, his attempt to elucidate a theory of tradition for the less complicated social order he imagined casts light on the relation of tradition and its clerics to diversity and intolerance. In doing so, he helps define the possibilities as well as the limitations of tradition in the present context of an irreducibly heterogenous modernity.[13]

"Tradition," Eliot wrote in one of his first essays on the subject, "may be conceived as a by-product of right living, not to be aimed at directly. It is of the blood, so to speak, rather than of the brain: it is the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present."[14] Eliot knew that tradition could not be prescribed as a remedy for modernity. He analyzed instead the conditions of right living that could, in his estimation, make tradition, and with it culture, possible. His commitment to tradition necessitated a certain amnesia in his presentation of the contemporary situation. Acknowledgment of the real

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13. Raymond Williams offers the following assessment of Eliot's attempt to identify culture with a whole way of life that dreams of a common culture among all members of the community: ". . . it now seems evident that the idea of not a community but an equality of culture — a uniform culture evenly spread — is essentially a product of the primitivism (often expressed as mediaevalism) which was so important a response to the harsh complexities of the new industrial society. Such an idea ignores the necessary complexity of any community which employs developed industrial and scientific techniques: . . . In any society towards which we are likely to move, it now seems clear that there must be, not a simple equality (in the sense of identity) of culture: but rather a very complex system of specialized development — the whole of which will form the whole culture, but which will not be available, or conscious, as a whole, to any individual or group living within it. See *Culture and Society 1780-1950 op. cit.*, pp. 237-38.

14. *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1934), p. 33.

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heterogeneity of the societies around him would have doomed his project.[15]

Tradition, for Eliot, represented the determining pattern of a whole and homogeneous way of life. It was not to be confused with dogma, for while dogma might grow out of tradition, tradition could not itself be reduced to the dogmatic: "is not solely, or even primarily, the maintenance of certain dogmatic beliefs; these beliefs have come to take their living form in the course of the formation of a tradition. What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rites to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of 'the same people living in the same place.' It involves a good deal which can be called *taboo*: that this word is used in our time in an exclusively derogatory sense is to me a curiosity of some significance."[16]

Eliot is right to emphasize the close association of tradition and taboo, and to distance the immediacy of taboo from the mediated rationalism of official dogma. Judgments attending a people's habitual actions tend not to be delivered in the legalistic style of dogmatic pronouncements. They tend to occur in the more visceral discourse of sentiments, of inexplicable movements of approbation or recoil. These are the tokens of taboos observed or broken. Because tradition functions on the level of the habitual and the taboo rather than the self-reflexive and dogmatic, the homogeneity of society is for Eliot crucial to the maintenance of a traditional order. The taboos of the various members and groups within society must harmonize if order is to reign.

Yet in positing the homogeneity necessary for an harmonious society, Eliot

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15. Though most of his attention was focused on Britain, he did occasionally offer reflections on the US. Here, aside from certain regions of the South where Southern intellectuals imagined recapturing an agrarian past, Eliot saw little hope for either tradition or culture. But even his hopes for the South, like his vision of Britain, were shaped by a certain willed obtuseness or amnesia. This is readily evident in his 1933 address at the University of Virginia, where he was able to explain why it was, in his estimation, that the South offered a more fertile ground for traditional culture than the North: "I think that the chances for the re-establishment of a native culture are perhaps better here than in New England. You are farther from New York; you have been less industrialized and less invaded by foreign races: and you have a more opulent soil. . . . It is not necessarily those lands which are the most fertile or the most favoured in climate that seem to me the happiest, but those in which a long struggle of adaptation between man and his environment has brought out the best qualities of both; in which the landscape has been moulded by numerous generations of one race, and in which the landscape in turn has modified the race to its own character." *After Strange Gods*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. Not only has Eliot forgotten who the inhabitants of this American region who might legitimately ask for the re-establishment of a native cultural tradition would have been, but he also forgets that the labor shaping the landscape he surveys was supplied not by one but by at least two races, one which once held the other in bondage and which, in 1933, continued to oppress them. If Eliot wants to claim that the invasion of New World society by foreign races is the primary threat to culture and tradition as he understands them, then the status of the Euro-Americans he addresses as the real foreign invaders on this soil is one he cannot afford to remember.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

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himself broke some crucial taboos in the modern tradition.[17] In an ill-famed passage from *After Strange Gods*, Eliot offers the following: "You are hardly likely to develop tradition except where the bulk of the population is relatively so well off where it is that it has no incentive or pressure to move about. The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background; and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable. There must be a proper balance between urban and rural, industrial and agricultural development. And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated."[18] In elaborating what he believes traditionalism would require, Eliot makes clear why modernity resists it. The traditional society violates enlightenment liberalism's taboo on intolerance. The relation of tradition, imagined as the grounding for a unified way of life, depends upon the exclusion of diversity in society, at least from the consciousness of the critic. For the achievement of such an "organic" unity in society, if it were possible, would require the critic to contemplate "ethnic cleansing." Eliot was never willing to admit these horrors. Though he never completely abandoned the position he described here, he did alter the explicit anti-Semitism and racism of his rhetoric.

More important, Eliot struggled to bring the dangerous fantasy of a traditional society more into alignment with the reality of a diverse community. As he would remark in *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture*, "We must not think of our culture as completely unified . . . [the] actual religion of no European people has ever been purely Christian, or purely anything else."[19] This may seem like too little to say, but it raises questions concerning the possibility of tradition in a society that is unavoidably heterogenous. Rather than the obvious impossibility of a wholly organic, unified society that too often colors the lenses of the traditionalists' vision, Eliot's later attempt to conceive tradition in terms of an at least limited heterogeneity makes the nature and place of tradition today clearer.

Here we must consider Eliot's comments on levels of society and the nature and functions of elites, best expressed in *The Idea of a Christian Society*.[20] Here

17. Christopher Ricks has attempted to examine the problem of prejudice in Eliot's thinking and in his poetry, though he seems too eager to deny that Eliot's prejudices were deeply seated and intrinsic to his system of belief. He effectively establishes that prejudice is part of a cultural system or, one might say, a tradition, that Eliot and his critics, even those who have attacked the prejudiced moments in his writing, have shared. See *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). On the origins of Eliot's beliefs about the links between culture and society as expressive of specifically American traditions, see Sigg, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-153.

18. *After Strange Gods*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

19. *Notes Toward a Definition of Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

20. Williams notes that Eliot makes important contributions to the discussion of culture and society in his analysis of hierarchies of culture and achievement with his distinction between "class" and "elite." Williams, *Culture and Society*, *op. cit.*, pp. 232-243.

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the modernity of Eliot's traditionalism is most evident. The preservation and transmission of tradition is the specialized task of an elite strata, one that serves but is not necessarily identified with the interests of a specific class.

Eliot does not rigidly define the hierarchy between the different strata of this society. Because, however, tradition must be more or less a question of unreflective habit and behavior, given a certain irreducible heterogeneity in society (which cannot tolerate very many free thinking Jews, but cannot insist that all members be believers), what is required is a disciplinary elite which can serve as custodians and transmitters of tradition: "the Community of Christians," by which he meant "not local groups, and not the Church in any one of its senses, unless we call it 'the Church within the Church.' These will be the consciously and thoughtfully practicing Christians, especially those of intellectual and spiritual superiority."[21] This community of Christians will be the unitary center providing the social network with stability and identity. It becomes closely identified with that quintessential modern creation, the intellectual: "The Community of Christians — a body of very nebulous outline — would contain both clergy and laity of superior intellectual and/or spiritual gifts. And it would include some of those who are ordinarily spoken of, not always

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Williams also observes that Eliot's thinking about culture has the salutary effect of ruling "out also those extreme forms of the idea of 'minority culture' in which it is supposed that the culture of a group can be maintained on its own terms, and within its own orbit, without reference to the progress of the culture of the whole society of which the group is a part" (235). Minority cultures and traditions cannot and should not be thought apart from their inevitable and frequently violent relations to the dominant.

21. *The Idea of a Christian Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 62-63. Eliot is quick to note that, unlike Coleridge, he would not expect the entire educational apparatus to be staffed with members of a believing clerisy, for in the modern state "the personnel will inevitably by mixed [and] one may even hope that the mixture may be a benefit to its intellectual variety"(63). But education itself will be conceived along Christian lines, meaning that it will transmit values as well as skills. Gross' view of tradition, though not as explicit, rests on a similar sense of the division of labor in which for the mass of people the significance of tradition registers unconsciously in behavior while for a select few, by implication numbering Gross and other intellectuals, the real importance of tradition is evident as is the significance of tradition's putative absence. Thus Gross writes: ". . . when our ancestors wanted to feel rooted in something secure and dependable, they reached out for tradition. In explaining their behavior, they probably would not have said they wanted security and rootedness, or the other needs mentioned above; what they probably would have said was that they wanted tradition" (65). In order to unpack the assumptions that make this brief passage symptomatically bizarre, one would have to consider that such a conversation, in which a native informant is asked *why* they "reach out for tradition," is one already invested in conflict and opposition, one in which tradition can only become visible in a context that is resolutely antitraditional and in which tradition itself is no longer (and never could really have been) simply native or naive. Gross' speculation reveals a presumed and very modern division of labor in which the contemporary or the primitive mass of people live traditions while a small number of specialized intellectuals speculate on tradition. That tradition itself, along with its functionalist explanation, might be the product of the latter never seems to occur to him.

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with flattering intention, as 'intellectuals'."[22]

Eliot is wrestling with a difficult problem, i.e., that of tradition as an effective antidote to the deficits of modern social administration. For if the reading of modern society as bereft of tradition is right, then the only solution appears to require more modernity in the sense of a carefully planned and administered Christian community, or other traditions, self-consciously imposed from above. In this regime, intellectuals of the clergy and laity, believers and nonbelievers, would have the definitive role to play. It will be for them, primarily through the educational apparatus, to construct the nation, for "only a proper system of education can unify the active and the contemplative life, action and speculation, politics and the arts."[23] Yet for all of Eliot's concerns with identifying the ideal of a Christian community with the existence of a Christian nation-state, the model of his construction is far different. This model depends on an "idyllic picture of the rural parish, . . . the idea of a small and mostly self-contained group attached to the soil and having its interests centered in a particular place, with a kind of unity which may be designed, but which also has to grow through generations." Though he advances this vision as an ideal, he quickly concedes that it is impossible to realize: "It is the idea, or ideal, of a community small enough to consist of a nexus of direct personal relationships, in which all iniquities and turpitude will take the simple and easily appreciable form of wrong relations between one person and another. But at present not even the smallest community, unless so primitive as to present objectionable features of another kind, is so simplified as this; and I am not advocating any complete reversion to any earlier state of things, real or idealized. The example appears to offer no solution to the problems of industrial, urban and suburban life which is that of the majority of the population."[24] Aware of the inadequacy of the traditional model he adopts to address the crisis of modernity, Eliot resorts to an elitist bureaucracy of culture and tradition — one which, while not clearly delimited or simply empowered, is charged with providing consensus

22. *The Idea of Christian Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 64-65. John Colmer, in his introduction to Coleridge's Church and State, notes that Eliot's revision of the clerisy makes it "much more of an intellectual aristocracy" than Coleridge envisioned.

23. *The Idea of a Christian Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 67. Eliot's model of a society that depends for its coherence on a traditionalist elite is structurally similar to Gramsci's formulation of the role of organic intellectuals in unifying a society in which archaic forms of heterogeneity persist. Thus Eliot's conservative traditionalism has a lot in common with the progressive modernism of his contemporary. In fact, Gramsci's illustration of the unifying role that intellectual elites can play in a heterogeneous society is, like Eliot's, drawn from ecclesiastical history. See, "The Study of Philosophy" *op. cit.*, pp. 323-43. For a discussion of Gramsci's relevance for contemporary intellectuals in an era where local specificity has supplanted a no longer credible pretense to universality among critical theorists, see R. Rhadhakrishnan, "Toward an Effective Intellectual: Foucault or Gramsci?" in Bruce Robbins, ed., *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics, Academics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 57-100.

24. *Idea of a Christian Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 59-60.

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through "their identity of belief and aspiration, their background a common system of education and a common culture, which will enable them to influence and be influenced by each other, and collectively to form the conscious mind and the conscience of the nation."[25] Thus, if the Christian Community is not to become a merely ineffectual cynical agency, society itself must be, as Eliot always insisted, already largely homogeneous. But it never is. Thus traditionalism, as an administrative strategy or critical vision, can never escape the problematic diversity of actually existing communities and institutions. Those traditions in the West best suited to negotiate heterogeneity are the traditions of a certain enlightened strain of modernity.

Heterogeneity, more than the pressure of modernity itself, is what defines the peculiar position of modern societies toward tradition today. As Eliot himself put it, in "the United States and the Dominions, ... the variety of races and religious communions represented appears to render the problem [of a unitary tradition] insoluble." And in his most provocative comment he notes: "Indeed, for these latter countries the problem might not appear even to exist; these countries might appear to be committed from their origin to a neutral form of society . . . But I believe that if these countries are to develop a positive culture of their own, and not remain merely derivatives of Europe, they can only proceed either in the direction of a pagan or of a Christian society."[26] And here the stakes, the origin, and the direction of Eliot's vision become clear. For if a certain homogeneity is required to support an intellectual elite, the elite in whose activities alone Eliot recognizes the quantity he calls culture, then the support of that elite may well be the end and not the means of social cohesion. Such social cohesion is, in Eliot's estimation, necessary for the achievements of high culture and fine art, as the intellectuals of the clerisy recognize those terms. Intellectuals then feel the urgent need for a traditional society to protect the place intellectuals would like to imagine themselves occupying in that society, as producers and guardians of its official culture, its institutionally sanctioned meanings, values, and norms.[27]

I do not mean to dismiss the importance of intellectuals. But I do want to focus attention on the non-innocent character of the traditional argument from the intellectual's perspective so that the intellectual's place and opportunities in the society she or he addresses may become clearer. What, extending Eliot's argument, can be the place of tradition and the intellectuals who identify with it, in a society whose defining attribute is not limited plurality but almost limitless

25. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

26. *The Idea of a Christian Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

27. Raymond Williams identifies a similar tendency in the thinking of Marxist critics who were Eliot's contemporaries. "Much of the 'Marxist' writing of the thirties was in fact the old Romantic protest that there was no place in contemporary society for the artist and the intellectual, with the new subsidiary clause that the workers were about to end the old system and establish Socialism, which would then provide such a place." *Culture and Society*, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

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heterogeneity? And this is the question that Gross' and most other critical versions of tradition and modernity fail to see. Because they fail to see the question, they also fail to see the place tradition already occupies in and against the modern social order. Because the traditions they would need to recognize are not, in many instances, their own. Can intellectuals be refunctioned to serve the traditions of a heterogenous society in which the modernist myth of a lost whole way of life and the uncritical privileging of certain traditions over others no longer serves to legitimate their office?

Tradition and History: Remembrance and Subversion

In assessing the promise of tradition, any critic who does not ask the most obvious question "whose" — the question of the articulation between tradition, the person who speaks in tradition's name, and the society as a whole — is bound to miss the most important and potentially useful already existing deployments of tradition, which are also refunctionings of tradition. If the critic wants to claim, as Gross does, that there are traditions that have been "repressed or persecuted by official society" but that nonetheless (or perhaps all the more) maintain their force "but underground and out of sight" (10), one needs to remember to ask under what ground and out of whose sight?[28]

28. Gross touches on this problem when he describes the relation of the historian's knowledge to tradition: "the narratives many historians related did not focus on the traditions considered essential by the people who lived within them" (82). This is a structural problem of the clerisy in attempting to prescribe and administer traditions. The nostalgia for a lost wholeness of life causes Gross, like other modernist critics, to suffer a form of amnesia similiar to Eliot's. He forgets the important roles traditions play in "our" society. For example, a challenging interest in a variety of traditions has appeared among intellectuals representative of groups whose identities and histories have been defined outside of and in opposition to those traditions and meanings for which mainstream intellectuals have claimed national or universal significance. African, Asian, Latino, and Native American critics and artists have drawn meanings for themselves and their communities from various traditions of their particular pasts that they have labored to recover. Of course, they have not always succeeded. But frequently, especially in the musical, literary, and cinematic arts, these intellectuals have drawn on and helped to reconstitute or remember traditions and meanings that stand in opposition to the dominant cultural and social order that has struggled to exclude them, to appropriate their products, and to forget their presence. If Euro-American intellectuals are searching for a refunctioned, oppositional tradition, the place to look is not in the fragments of a dominant tradition whose universality was always illusory and oppressive, but rather in the local specificity of other traditions, cultures, and history that actively thrive and are still largely unheard and unseen around "us." There is more productive thought about politics, tradition, and transformation in Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, or in Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club* then in all the critical meditation on tradition and politics that excludes such productions, which are both explicitly "ethnic" (from the dominant viewpoint which tends to forget its own particularity) and popular, from consideration and from critique and focuses on the illusory loss of a plenitude of meaning that has never existed in any politically useful form and, in the second place,

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What community and what culture does one speak in and for? In neglecting to ask these questions, Gross, like many modern critics, mistakes for a universally valuable cultural commodity called, without qualifier, "tradition," what is actually the property of a small corporate entity of mainstream, middle-class, and traditionally male European or Europeanized intellectuals. This is not to deny that some of these traditions, among them traditions deriving from the Enlightenment, associated with this group and its history, may not have validity beyond the group in which they originate. It is to point out that no critical consideration of tradition can, in "our" society, assume that validity as given without apologizing for the very sort of top down imposition and manipulation of tradition that Gross cites as modernity's failing.

I dwell on this not because Gross is arguing for a return to tradition, but because his blindness (characteristic of much Critical Theory) to the other traditions around him forces him to misconstrue the nature and oppositional potential of tradition. To realize this requires not only a refunctioning of once dominant traditions but also a refunctioning of the intellectuals in the dominant culture who have dreamed of performing the office of a unified and unifying tradition's clerics.

One problem in the work of Gross and other social critics is the lack of clear definition of what tradition is or even of the sort of thing one means when one evokes tradition. Here Eliot's observation that tradition is "primarily a matter of behavior and habit" rather than of active cognition or reflection is apt. In the context of modernity, which is the defining context for all these problematics, tradition is precisely those forms of belief or patterns of behavior that fail to achieve the "thorough-going reflexivity" and transparency to reason that are the distinguishing marks of modernist institutions.[29] Yet, if this is true, then no position and no institution within modernity can be said to be traditionless. Coleridge had it almost right when he wrote: "it is the privilege of the few to possess an idea: of the generality of men, it might be more truly affirmed, that they are possessed by it."[30] Stripped of their elitism, Coleridge's words constitute the needed definition of tradition. Tradition is what we

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has usually been evoked to justify the very exclusion, the very blindness to existing traditions, that these works attempt to undo.

The significance of these traditions is not the result of any organic or essential authenticity they might possess, nor does it derive from any impossibly pure alterity they might offer. Like all traditions, they are products of invention and subject to manipulation. Like other traditions, these too are available to be coopted by the market, the media, and the state. But the significance of these "other" traditions originates in their historical positioning in or exclusion from the dominant discourses of culture and history that they oppose. The dominance of those discourses is structured upon the determined forgetting of what these other traditions struggle to recollect and represent.

29. See Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, *op. cit.*, p. 20. As Giddens points out, the reflexivity of modernity, its desire for complete transparency of its assumptions to rational scrutiny, actually undermines rather than establishes certainty.

30. "On the Constitution of the Church and the State," *op. cit.*, p. 13.

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evoke when we are unable to give an unimpeachably rational response to the question "why?" Tradition is the name for those ideas that, without our conscious awareness, possess us and deliver to us our life-world and our own subjectivity within it. Thus, while critical intellectuals have often attempted to claim an exemption from tradition in order to embrace or attack it, a special perspective from which the presence or absence of tradition becomes an object of rather than grounds for knowledge, these claims are misconceived.[31] If tradition is something that is not and perhaps cannot be made conscious, if we do not select or constitute traditions but are constituted or selected by them, then how — or more important why — should we think prescriptively about tradition at all? As intellectuals, thinking about tradition is one thing we do. How we do it, as Gross argues, may be the key.

For Eliot, finally, tradition affords a way of limiting and controlling conflict by imagining the silence of diverse or divisive minority cultures. This is crucial, for here the political requirements and implications of a society in which tradition functions to furnish common meanings become clear. In Eliot's view, conflicts between different cultures in a single society, rather than conflict itself, constitutes cultural decline in a social organization. The loss of coherence is the key. As Eliot puts it, "Cultural disintegration is present when two or more strata so separate that these become in effect distinct cultures; and also when culture at the upper group level breaks into fragments each of which represents one cultural activity alone."[32] This is not, in distinction to Gross and others who present the most common critique of modernity, a view in which the absence of historical traditions equals an absence of existential meanings. Rather, it is a view dismayed by conflicts between a welter of histories, traditions, and meanings that contradict each other. It is not a situation in which there are no meanings, but one in which meanings are contested and the positioning and culture of the

31. In attempting to imagine a world without tradition (which he denies exists) Gross actually establishes one locus in which one might establish tradition's unsuspected presence. Imagining a society that had broken off its ties to tradition (and noting that "in the view of some [this break] has already occurred," he writes: "Whatever 'speech' might then emerge would be entirely self-generated, for, with the dialogue with tradition at an end, there would be nothing coming from the past that could provide even the rudiments of a meaningful discourse" (15). Without reproducing the history of philology one must note what Gross himself probably knows, that no language can function without intimate ties to the past. One thing that comes from the past and furnishes precisely the rudiments of meaningful discourse is, of course, language. And the meanings embedded in and transmitted by historical languages may be one very real and quite powerful locus of tradition today. Gross' assertion, later in his argument, that images and television do not engage a history or tradition of meaning seems to me largely incoherent, given the history and over-determination of various sorts of visual representation (58). What seems to underly his misapprehension of these modes of representation, especially television, is that they transmit meanings and perhaps even traditions without the benefit of legitimation by intellectuals. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

32. *Notes Toward a Definition of Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

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elite are questioned or are under attack. It is not a situation in which there is no culture, but one in which no single culture or tradition has an uncontested claim to legitimate dominance.

This is the present predicament and the reconstruction of our thinking about tradition required to confront it. Stating the matter in these terms allows a clearer view of the position and the possible remedies (if remedy it needs) and the possible benefits (if any) and costs of doing so as well as how these benefits and costs should be apportioned. What role can tradition play in a society in which cultural disintegration in this specific sense has become, at least at this moment, the norm? What role can tradition play in the work of intellectuals who are not interested in eliminating conflict but perhaps in helping to direct its energy?

Within Gross' description of tradition there is the possibility of another reading of tradition, one which makes explicit the relation of dominant traditions to the dynamics of forgetting and the conflict between traditions. At a crucial moment, Gross evokes Arnold Gehlen, who in turn evokes Freud to explain tradition as a kind of psycho-social defense mechanism. "By this interpretation, tradition provides what Gehlen calls 'relief' (*Entlastung*). Specifically, the relief provided by tradition screens out or neutralizes an excess of stimuli, thus permitting human beings to function more effectively. . . . It sets up a background of habitualized behavior which leads to a certain amount of stability and constancy. . . . Beyond this view, one can also hypothesize, as Freud did, that there exists an inherent organic need to repeat. Arguably, all human beings harbor an urge to return to an earlier state of existence. Freud called this urge the 'repetition compulsion,' by which he meant the drive to restore some earlier pleasurable point in time, . . ." (64). Here we move beyond any possibility of refunctioning tradition in the voluntaristic sense Gross proposes. For if tradition becomes an "insulating second nature" then it cannot be the object of cognitive choice for the individual nor can it be administratively imposed by any group, however small, however "populist," or however distant from a center of power. But tradition, in the conflicted and uneven field of a heterogeneous society, depends upon precisely this view of habit, repression, and compulsion Gross evokes.

There is a flaw in Gross' account of the manner in which a refunctioned traditionalism might shake things up. After having rejected as unworkable, and perhaps undesirable, traditionalism's paradoxical attempt to impose tradition as "new forms of social integration," Gross argues that tradition may provide "access to what might be called the *unheimisch*. I use this term because it clearly expresses what the otherness of tradition seems to offer." (86) Gross elects what he calls the somewhat antiquated term "*unheimisch*" in contradistinction to the more familiar psychoanalytic and aesthetic term "*unheimlich*" without explaining why (p. 150, n. 11). Yet, as he describes the functioning of tradition as the "*unheimisch*," there seems to be something uncannily familiar in what he has to say. For if the study of tradition offers thecritical intelligence more critical

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leverage against the pressures of the present, "an imaginative entry into an alien turn of mind" (to cite Clifford Geertz), a "non-nostalgic *recherche du temps perdu* to expand and deepen the possibilities of critique" then it is indistinguishable from certain common romantic and post-romantic definitions of history itself. The aim of history, indistinguishable from Gross' refunctioning of the historical study of tradition, is critical self-knowledge.[33]

Yet, there seems no necessary reason, as Gross makes this case, that tradition, understood in this traditionally historical way, should have the "shock" effect he claims for it. There seems to be no real reason, as Gross himself seems to admit, that this traditionally historical understanding of tradition should "disturb the familiar rather than sustain it" (100). Nor do I think this to be a problem involving a generalized toleration of contradiction in modern culture or careless habits of reading, as Gross claims.[34] The "subversive genealogy" on which Gross imagines the shock of tradition to depend requires the

33. See, e.g., R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), esp. pp. 197-249. When Gross discusses recovering tradition through its traces, it becomes more and more apparent that he is not discussing tradition at all, but that other hallmark of modernity, history. For at stake is not the warm, preoedipal, enclosure of an imagined traditional social and cultural order, but the transmission of "information" from the past. When he writes of the "pseudo-past" and the "pseudo-traditions" invented by the state and the marketplace and which he deplores, he writes with real conviction: "In both, no messages are really received from the past. Rather, present day messages are inserted into the past and then supposedly recovered; but what is actually recovered is only the present's conception of the past. That so many people today seem to accept the fabricated images of the past as authentic, and consequently experience the past mainly in synthetic form, may be some indication of how far the present age has lost touch with the actual past and its traditions." (76) The last word of this paragraph cannot obscure the anti-traditionalism of Gross' position. What is at issue is an accurate relation with an actual past, then clearly history and not tradition is what is at stake. Moreover, the opposition of history and tradition on the basis of some objective or neutral standard of what is or is not properly receiving and accurately (i.e., neutrally) representing messages from the past is, in the face of two hundred years of the philosophy of history from Hegel through Nietzsche, Dilthey, Croce, and White, clearly untenable. History is always synthetic and always, in some way, involved with the projection and putative recovery of present obsessions, one of which, of course, is tradition itself. The point is not that there is no difference between tradition and history, but first that in the terms Gross uses tradition appears as history and, second, that in these terms history and tradition are difficult to distinguish. They are, in fact, different if only in the crucial sense that history has, under modernity, tended to be what that form of knowledge produced precisely to contest traditional ways of knowing the past. In this light, history, as Gross denominates it, seems a poor candidate to assist in the recuperation of tradition (78). It is too little to say, as Gross does, that traditionalism is frequently ahistorical, it may be fundamentally anti-historical. Gross himself suggests this at one point: "history's 'rational gaze' effectively stripped tradition of exactly those irreplaceable qualities that traditionalism had most wanted to protect: its sacredness, its mystique, and its unchallengeable authority. In this respect, history as information about tradition seemed to eviscerate the very thing it attempted to preserve" (81). Yet he does not seem to register the force of his own argument. Rather than making history simply inappropriate for the rescue of tradition, this makes history fundamentally antagonistic to it.

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intervention of traditional clerics to distinguish authentic from spurious traditional forms: "The kind of subversive genealogy I have in mind would not, like Nietzsche's, try to destroy the past's hold on the present, but rather destroy the present's hold on the past. Today the oppressiveness of the tradition is not our problem. We are not victims of the past and are not strait jacketed by past determinations. Instead, the danger lies more with the exploitative refunctioning of tradition, particularly in the political and economic sphere . . ." (117).

This is a very different argument from the one with which Gross began. At first he appeared to claim that modernity's implacable hostility to tradition rendered contemporary life vulnerable to the triple threat of state, market, and media. As his argument has progressed, however, each of these quantities has become more and more the vehicle not of an attack on tradition but of an oppressive refunctioning of tradition to serve the ends of power. Life then is not meaningless; it is suffused with the wrong meanings. The critics' job is not to reclaim or refunction traditions as much as it is to cleanse or purify them, to rectify and restore them to their authentic function, "to locate the point where an apparently authentic tradition, or part of one, became inauthentic: the point, that is, where it began to be pulled from its context and refunctioned politically or economically" (118). But it is difficult to see what the point of this exercise might be, apart from the pleasures it might offer. At base, like Gross' view of reading, it seems to depend on a naive and untenable view of how meaning relies upon original context for its authenticating force. If traditions, like words, cannot take on different meanings in new contexts, if they cannot be "refunctioned" by the state or by the opposition, then they cannot have any force or significance at all.

Gross' view of tradition is finally not a traditional refunctioning but a very familiar version of modernist critique. He does not seek to rescue or refurbish traditions in a modern world devoid of meaning, but to criticize the role traditions play in that world. By implication, the role he posits for the intellectuals he addresses is that of a clerisy stripped of the authority of dogma and armed only with their own distaste for the manner in which they imagine that the people around them are living their lives. In Gross' imagination, tradition is pitted against tradition and the critics, finally, will judge which traditions are authentic. Though in his account authenticity does not, in itself, assure that any tradition will be morally defensible or politically useful.

If tradition were imagined to be involved more in a determined uncanniness, an actual *unheimlische*, than an unmotivated strangeness, then the clash of traditions and of significances in the modern world would make more sense as a subversive activity. If one resituates the problematic of tradition within the dynamics of repression and significance explored by Freud and which Gross

34. In fact, Gross' model of the transmission through literature which he describes on pages 101-105, is hopelessly precritical and untenable, depending, as it does, on a model of reading that in its naiveté about written texts predates Plato.

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seems determined to avoid, one might uncover the dynamic and explosive associations between present and past traditions that remain politically volatile and therefore critically useful.

If tradition is to function as tradition, as a ground for meaning rather than as an object of cognition, then it must have power to interpellate subjectivities. But if tradition is the ground of meaning, how can other meanings or other traditions register or be heard at all, much less evoke the defamiliarizing shock that Gross, at times, imagines traditions' critical effect to be. In any historical or political context, only certain traditions have the subversive relation to the dominant culture Gross describes. Otherness itself, as he is constrained to admit, has no particular charge at all. But those forms of otherness with which the dominant imaginary is already implicated but for whom that implication has been systematically denied or excluded from officially sanctioned consciousness are those forms of tradition or otherness that might be called on to challenge the "basic structures of modern life"(86). This challenge, most often, comes not from the clerisy or from traditional intellectuals but from populations that have themselves been excluded from recognition in the scenes of the modern life they already inhabit.

Perhaps the current "debate" about gays in the military may furnish an illustration. Whether, in fact, any basic material structures of military life are at stake is questionable, but Colin Powell, Jesse Helms, and others clearly feel a certain shock at a very basic level at the thought that the admitted presence of gay men and women in the military might actually be acknowledged. What, in fact, is at stake in this "debate" and the widespread hysteria that has attended it? This hysteria represents a shaking up or subversion of structures of thought and identity. What gives this debate its particular force is that the form of otherness that has come to challenge the traditional construction of dominant, heterosexual masculinity in the military is not simply other but other in a determinate manner. Homosexuality is not merely external to traditional masculinity but is frequently, through anxiety, denial, or repression, part of its composition. Homosexuals, as everyone admits, are already present and functioning in the corps, doing the drills, taking the showers, and running the risks. What is the confrontation of a certain tradition of military identity and the sexist, homophobic traditions that subtend it with a determinant form of alterity that calls the legitimacy of these traditions into question, not because this form of alterity is so clearly other but precisely because its otherness to the dominant and therefore the structure of identity and significance of it, are precisely — through its relation — what is in question.

In this debate, those who oppose the exclusionary structures of military tradition do so by calling upon another familiar tradition, the liberationist politics that form one of the liberal Enlightenment's great traditions. The questions critics need to ask of gays who seek to change the military's exclusionary codes are the same Gross would ask of any other tradition. These questions derive from the critical traditions of the Enlightenment and of modernity itself:

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"Does the tradition contain an element of truth which would be irretrievably lost if the tradition did not survive? Is it creatively enabling, making possible a more enriched presence in the world? Is it a source of real heterogeneity and diversity which should not be allowed to disappear? Does the tradition help advance critical consciousness? Does it promote individual autonomy and responsibility, or strengthen moral self-awareness?" (129). Gays seeking inclusion in the military's traditions challenge the grounds of meaning and open the possibility of altering the meanings and forms by which subjectivities are structured and power circulates in the communities defined by these debates.

Living traditions, and the specific groups of people who carry, transmit and sometimes suffer them, seldom simply disappear though they are sometimes violently driven from sight. Tradition, the argument against or dialogue with it, depends on the power of interpellation and the power of the repressed, for whatever force it may have. It is this power, not any pedigree that history might establish, that grants tradition — for good or ill — as oppression or liberation, superstition or enlightenment, power or its antidote — whatever force it has. Unless this be acknowledged there is little about tradition worth saying. But as a polemical force in the inevitable contest over the grounds and meanings of traditional identities and in response to the challenges and crises of a heterogenous and rapidly changing society, tradition still finds a part to play in exactly those situations in which we are often surprised to find ourselves. The critical talent therefore remains at odds with the traditional mentality while it does not, itself, cease to be traditional.

Rotten Traditions?

Russell Jacoby

"Any academic must learn the culture and feelings of the people," stated the student union president of Jamia Millia Islamia, India's pre-eminent Muslim university. The university's vice-chancellor unfortunately failed in this respect. He questioned the government ban on Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, outraging Muslim students, who demanded his death. They also tried to carry out their sentence, which led to violent riots and the closing of the university. The

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student union president explained why he thought the vice-chancellor must die; by suggesting *The Satanic Verses* should be available, the vice-chancellor had mocked Muslim customs and traditions.[1]

David Gross wants these traditions saved and revitalized. Of course, this is unfair. *The Past in Ruins* is marked by too fine an intelligence to suppose Gross supports Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover his general project is salutary; Gross rejects both post-modern blatherings about the present and nostalgic toasts to the past. He wants to recuperate certain traditions that would sustain a contemporary critique.

Yet *The Past in Ruins* is not only learned, it is ethereal, floating above messy history. Gross never gets around to telling us which traditions he wants salvaged; or he only hints at what he has in mind, like "council democracy." The lack of details and specific references are not simply accidental omissions; Gross prefers to keep his distance. From afar he can pick out traditions, but he is unable to describe them. He is a bird watcher, who only spots generic birds.

Gross' inclination for spatial and geographic approaches either causes or compounds his distance. He points out where subversive traditions might be found, not what they are. He "maps" and "locates" them, but gets no closer. He wants to salvage "those traditions that have been dismissed, censured, occluded, marginalized, surpassed, or suppressed." Fine, but this covers a lot of territory — and would include Christian and Islamic fundamentalism, which also have been dismissed, marginalized and surpassed.

To continue to be unfair, one can criticize Gross for promoting a counterfeit tradition even as he argues for the real thing. Without content, tradition becomes as empty as the religion that conservative commentators praise. They preach that America needs religion — any religion. Religion is backed in the name of utility, not truth; it keeps families together and makes the country strong.

Gross almost treats tradition in the same way. Staying clear of its substance, he is led willy-nilly to argue for the practical import of tradition. He gets caught between the jargon of authenticity and the idiom of sociology. He tries to define tradition both by existential categories like "ontological security" and by formal characteristics. For "any tradition to be authentic" it must bind together generations; it must "carry a certain amount of spiritual and moral prestige;" and it must "convey a sense of continuity between the past and present." The KKK fits the bill quite nicely. It looks back to an Aryan past; it carries moral prestige; it brings together fathers and sons.

Obviously Gross does not mean this. He doesn't like Nazism and he objects to the state manipulation of traditions. Yet Gross's protests against authoritarian or manipulated traditions are not compelling. These traditions, he writes, are "artificially sustained," which he contrasts to "naturally surviving traditions." In seeking to distinguish the contrived from the natural, he succumbs to the

1. "Elite Muslim University in India is Torn by Violence Over Professor's Remark," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 30, 1992), p. A33.

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lure of authenticity. We must understand "which elements authentically come from the past, and which were inserted in the present with specifically manipulative ends in mind." He offers few clues how to proceed in this task, perhaps because it is not only hopeless, but risky; it suggests blood tests and birth certificates. What constitutes an authentic tradition? Little seems more authentically traditional than anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

Although he cites them both, the insights of Nietzsche and Freud make little impression on Gross. Their writings teach that the highest morality and ethics bespeaks violence and pain. However, Gross simply contrasts authentic and manipulative traditions, as if the former were created by do-gooders and pacifists. Even "council democracy" rests on ideas of equality that were hardly natural or authentic. Mutual respect may be a late product of civilization, something that is achieved through pain.

One final point: Gross opens his book quoting Burke. Burke defended tradition against the French Revolution and the Enlightenment; he preferred the old order and its prejudice to a new order with its reason. For any critical theory, Burke has much to offer; but the effort to rethink tradition must include a reassessment of Burke and the politics of tradition.

I offer these criticisms in the spirit of solidarity. Gross's book is not only provocative, it is necessary. A case in point: For an article about teen and preteen mothers, a *Los Angeles Time* reporter quizzed very young mothers, virtually children themselves, about their thoughts and plans. The usual explanations that inner city youth lacked knowledge of birth control proved wide of the mark. The kids knew about birth control; nor did they lack access to it. The fourteen and fifteen year olds wanted children. Why? Here the young parents became inarticulate. Several responded by echoing advertising slogans from athletic sneakers like "Do It Now!"

This might be dubbed the ruin of tradition; all human relations, affection, and contacts have shriveled, been supplanted by biological realities dressed up in market garb. Gross's effort to rescue a tradition that speaks to the present must be set against a reality that reduces life to buying, selling and reproducing. He carries out his laudable project with skill and sureness. Nevertheless, I think his scope is too narrow; his distance from the material too great. In the 1990s a meditation on tradition must consider a fundamentalism that taps two elements that Gross finds valuable: the past and a discontent with modernity. Gross remains too far above the fray — too professorial, perhaps too traditional.

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Second Thoughts on Traditions

Paul Gottfried

The Past in Ruins examines tradition as a cluster of feelings organized around a presumed past which is both evoked and used deceitfully. David Gross contends that politicians and others have shaped traditions according to their changing needs. He is particularly persuasive in showing how "nostalgia" is created by a host of manipulators, from advertisers and script writers to politicians. One illustration that comes to mind is the shifting image of past presidencies that became associated with Ronald Reagan. Once in office Reagan changed his mind about the oppressiveness of the government he came to head. He assumed its custodianship and thereafter spoke of supply-side economics instead of calling for a scaling back of the managerial state. In *The Illusion of a Conservative Reagan Revolution*, Larry M. Schwab demonstrates the policy continuities between Carter and Reagan. According to Schwab, Reagan did little to reverse the growth of the federal bureaucracy or the level of federal spending inherited from his predecessor. But he did depict himself as a counter-revolutionary; his anti- and pre-New Deal images gained eventually the endorsement of journalists across the political spectrum. Presentations of his presidency as a return to the 1920s and to the time of Calvin Coolidge became common. Kevin Phillips, Sid Blumenthal, and *American Spectator* all engaged in this depiction, and one neoconservative, Thomas Silver, produced a tailor-made biography of Coolidge portraying him as a worthy model for American leaders in the 1980s. According to Silver, Coolidge appreciated both the free market and political equality. Even better, he was alleged to have read the Declaration of Independence in the manner of Silver's teacher, Harry Jaffa, a longtime advocate of the Cold War as a crusade for American democracy.

At the same time, other efforts were made to trace the principles of the Reagan presidency back to the New Deal. After all, Reagan had not come to dismantle the welfare state but, as Irving Kristol asserted, to make it " fiscally conservative." Thus Kristol, George Will, and various *Commentary* contributors pointed to Reagan's function in solidifying the democratic welfare state initiated by Woodrow Wilson and FDR. Reagan was also praised for keeping alive the Cold War liberal legacy going back to Harry Truman.

It is not clear whether Gross views all contemporary tradition as the work of greedy merchants and knavish politicians. He does speak of "recuperating" the past from both the market and the state. His hope of finding tradition in a

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special compartment of the past which alienated consciousness has thus far ignored betrays some degree of utopian desperation. Surely there are traditions even now that are not reducible to false consciousness or that can only be discovered through speculative archeological expeditions.

In the past, as Gross recognizes, there were appeals to tradition from which societies gained order and direction. The Roman dictum *mos pro lege* and the Rabbinic *minhag kmo din*, both of which equate custom and tradition, are basic to the way communities have usually operated. Custom combined with the force of ancestral authority provides for social stability and fixed responsibility. And though such custom and authority may take little account of individual feeling and be derived from the unacknowledged value choices of elders and judges, they are not the artificial and cynical recreation of the past Gross is describing. In Aeschylus's *Oresteia* one encounters attitudes about experienced tradition rather different from those expressed by Gross in his critique of false tradition. The Aeschylean drama moves from the unfolding of the curse of the House of Atreus, marked by the killings of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, to the celebration of Athenian custom (*nomima*) as the denouement of the trilogy. The intended lesson is that cities can only function on the basis of legal tradition and judicial authority sanctioned by a divine source. In this case that source is not only Zeus and Pallas Athena but, more interestingly, also the Erinys. The once implacable Furies take on a new identity, turning into the Eumenides (well-disposed women), after becoming associated with Athens's legal institutions. Aeschylus's choice of the curse of Atreus as his subject is equally revealing. In this tangled legend, perhaps of Mycenean origin, incorporating patricide, fratricide, and incest, the dramatist found material for his teaching that a well-ordered city could bend even the will of the gods.

What Gross sets out to criticize is not the force of custom to which Aeschylus or common law traditions appeal. Nor is he directing his shafts at ancestral example and epic virtue, from whence came the behavioral models of premodern societies. The authors of the Homeric legends, for example, did not scheme to enslave their contemporaries to a hegemonic ideology. They were repeating and expanding a work of oral literature which had come out of the Achaean courtly life of the pre-Dorian Hellenic world. The resulting literary accretions evolved over centuries into the staple of Greek education and into a mirror of manly conduct. There is in any case a difference between a genuine cultural artifact, be it the Bible or the *Iliad*, and the manipulated, instantaneous traditions ridiculed by Gross. So too is there a distinction to be drawn between the slow, spreading cult of national and religious heroes, such as the Virgin Mary for the Poles, Joan of Arc for the French, and King David for the Jews, and the manufactured assortment of saints in the current American political pantheon. Thus the American media, having pushed the state and federal governments into the canonization of Martin Luther King, has begun to transfer its adoration to King's radical critic in the civil rights movement, Malcolm X. This transfer of its alliegances by the media may actually have the

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effect of changing popular opinion, which no longer seems tied to any collective historical memory. A cult created almost overnight in the early 1980s can be torn down as quickly and frenetically as it went up. It can also survive the substitution of one cultic figure by another, as long as either serves the same political interests, which in this case is authorizing the managerial state to cleanse us of insensitive attitudes.

Tradition looks for a correlation between various contrived pasts and the political and social changes of the modern era. The rise of a consumer economy and society and the growth of government increasingly divorced from any meaningful practice of self-government help explain, according to Gross, the popularization of the *ersatz* past. This fabricated past remains a transition to or backdrop for the present, without being allowed to challenge the primacy of the here and now. Gross points to cinematic and commercial invocations of "good old days" themes, which appeal to nostalgia but leave the present as the only serious point of reference. This discussion was, for me, particularly enlightening, because it proved to what extent my own youthful nostalgia had reflected the cultural industries of the 195Os. I too had projected a combination of Avonlea and Walt Disney films onto my conception of the North American past.

Gross writes insightfully about the cinema of nostalgia, but he may be going after a flea with a sledgehammer. The older American films that appealed to patriotism and duty were often banal but not morally sinister. And while it is possible to key their plots and messages to someone's social interest, one might also be justified in responding: "So what?" Such flics also provided a kind of civic culture which taught respect for earlier generations and for an American society which was fading or had already vanished. Even more important, that manipulation of the past Gross dissects may no longer be as significant now as it was thirty or forty years ago. Such a practice belonged to a period of managerial transition, when people, including burcaucrats and film makers, still felt bereft of a past. By now there may be less of a perceived need for one, be it real or contrived. An observation that dawned on me in writing on conservative movements is how weak the historical sense has become on the American Right. In the late 1940s conservatives worshipped at the shrinc of the American or Western Christian heritage; by the 1980s, however, they or their second-generation counterparts were changing their object of worship. They began to notice how much America had progressed socially in recent decades, and so they conceived of a mission for the American state to spread everywhere an already perfected democratic capitalism. Not tradition but global democratic revolution became the watchword for the transformed American Right.

The conventional Left has come up with its own version of this end-of-history: building a world without homophobia, gender distinctions, racial insensitivities, or any of the telltale signs of traditional communal life. In any case, the Left is no more willing to tolerate tradition than the Right, except as a precedent for further upheaval. Nor is there need any longer for holding up the past as an innocuous alternative to the present. What most Americans

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once viewed as their past has become expendable decor. Mediacrats. managers, and social therapists are now pursuing other strategies of domination: for example, identifying the past with unrelieved wickedness and bigotry except for gleams of light provided by harbingers of victimological consciousness. If French republicans replaced the pre-revolutionary liturgical calendar by one of their own making, the present American cultural leadership has carried out a similar reform. The feminist and civil rights lobbies have occupied the winter months, shoving aside the American heroes of an earlier generation in order to replace them with trendier figures and more up-to-date devotions. The outcries against this practice have been far from overwhelming, and even the American conservative movement has rushed to certify the new liturgical calendar. Thus Jack Kemp and William Bennett have reinterpreted Martin Luther King as an Aristotelian philosopher. In line with this revisionism, the *Wall Street Journal* responded to Spike Lee's latest film by observing that Malcolm X had been a friend of democratic capitalism. Unlike the French peasantry of the 1790s, neither the American middle class nor its self-styled defenders will resist the reconstruction of its hagiography.

This fact may substantiate part of Gross' argument. Those raised on plastic histories are not driven to rage when the patterns are redone or simply thrown away. If the media tell them that their grandparents' generation was grossly insensitive, so be it, providing it does not affect entitlements or interfere with lifestyles. Peoples used to fight *pro aris et focis*; but that was before families broke down into self-actualizing individuals and well before the media took charge of historical memory.

One of the problems Gross sees resulting from this shrinking of the past is the weakening of human identities. These identities depend on belonging to settled communities, which the state and the economy have both helped destroy. Plastic consciousness and manipulated histories are certainly useful for social control, and given that fact it is hard to imagine why those who do the controlling with so little effort would accept a reduction of their power, so that people may return to organic relations they do not seem to miss — or even know they need. Gross should not be criticized for making elitist presumptions concerning the Good, which most of our countrymen may not comprehend. I agree with the thrust of his arguments that "traditions" have been shamelessly manipulated while the American people have lost a fixed sense of the past and of who they are. What should be stressed, however, is the difficulty of counteracting this problem for two reasons: the problematic nature of reestablishing a credible social tradition, and the lack of any popular clamor for one.

Almost all past attempts to restore traditions since the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars have resulted in either failure or misrepresentation. Not all movement in that direction should be equated with aristocratic or clericalist reaction, but it can be argued that the most dramatic assaults on communal identities in Western history began in the period of democratic and liberal revolution and produced reactions on both ends of the political

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spectrum. Also, the alternative social models constructed by the counterrevolutionary Right and the communitarian Left not only overlapped but dramatized a shared dilemma: the increasing irrelevance of anything in the past to which critics could appeal to rebuild social order. Faced by political upheaval and bureaucratic centralization, communitarians embraced "utopian" solutions often predicated on millennarian expectations. Karl Mannheim was correct in perceiving "eschatological fervor" in the romantic reactionary project of going forward (not back) to the Middle Ages. In a similar manner, Meyer Howard Abrams notes that a recurrent theme among romantic visionaries of both Left and Right was the return to tradition in a higher form. Revolution was seen as an instrument in driving this process forward. Thus Joseph de Maistre and William Blake hailed the French Revolution from opposing political positions as the prelude to their own idealized ends. Abrams treats as common to these visions a speculative reworking of a Neoplatonic motif, the return of the soul to its primal source.

But the question here is one less of genealogy than of relevance. Can one go back to an improved past by moving forward? What do reprised, historicized Neoplatonic myths teach about the social and cultural possibilities in the present? The answer may be, very little. Sometimes it is shocking to see alleged examples of traditions that have come back improved. Thus when Alan Wolfe and Ben Wattenberg depict American suburbs as a humane refinement of traditional communal life, Athens without particularity, I see the madness to which the doctrine of Progress has driven some journalists and social scientists. I also think of my experience in a suburb of Washington, in which I hardly ever saw my co-dwellers and where I noticed no one sitting on porches or going on family walks. That same suburb housed many of the public figures inspired by the Reagan Revolution, who ten years ago were announcing a return to community.

Despite this politicized nostalgia about community, it may be impossible to prove that Americans are pining for one or that the plastic culture which Gross dislikes has run into trouble. American per capita income is still the tenth highest in the world, and though our inner cities are awash in violence, most Americans do not live there any longer. Whence the less excited responses to the Los Angeles riot in 1992 than to the violence engulfing our cities in 1967. From Yankelovich and other polls, it also seems that American voters are concerned almost exclusively with economic issues. To whatever extent they are interested in moral and social ones, it is because they view them as related to the economy. Most Americans do not grieve over their racist, sexist, or homophobic sins as presented on TV or in universities. But even less important for them is the question of tradition, which by now has been reduced to the political non-issue of "family values." It is even incorrect to generalize about popular disgust with the managerial state, as George Will did in a January 21, 1993 syndicated column. Will quotes Everett Carl Ladd to the effect that Americans voted for Clinton and the Democrats at least partly to

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express their unhappiness with big government. Americans have supposedly grown unhappy with state administrators who took 26.6% of their aggregate income in the Kennedy years but have now increased the tax bite to 37%. It is unclear how Wills's figures indicate that Americans are "still sick of government." Surely it has not escaped their attention that, as Will himself observes, a household of four is already paying on average to all levels of government over $23,000 annually and will likely soon be paying more. Americans may complain about taxes and the government's lack of responsiveness, but they behave like Russian serfs when it comes to surrendering their earnings. Benjamin Ginsburg's description of the American electorate as the "captive public" may be cruel but is also more accurate than the talk about embattled taxpayers trying to take back their country.

Be that as it may, American social critics sometimes mistake a disagreeable society for one on the skids. World civilizations have included Assyrians as well as Greeks and Hebrews, and one of its current vulgarized examples, the American empire, has just outlasted its major global enemy and still displays impressive signs of vitality. Like my paleoconservative friends, *Telos* may be looking for the divine hand in history, by imagining that an atomized America will either collapse entirely or rise to a renewed sense of community. There is no reason to imagine that either will happen in the foreseeable future. In the long run, Aeschylus may be right that "all things move toward an end"; fragmented, servile societies may reach that end sooner and more disastrously than other kinds, everything else being equal. But technology and the possibility it opens of moving away from the most decayed and most violent sectors of American life may be giving yuppie culture a long reprieve. Hypocritical egotists imitating sensitized zombies may even prosper, at least temporarily, with burglar alarms, rapid transit to center city, and rotating surrogate families. There is no evidence that this state of affairs is changing.

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*On Tradition**

Theodor W. Adorno

1

Tradition comes from *tradere*: to hand down. It recalls the continuity of generations, what is handed down by one member to another, even the heritage of handicraft. The image of handing down expresses physical proximity, immediacy — one hand should receive from another. Such immediacy is the more or less natural relation of a familial sort. The category of tradition is essentially feudal, just as [Werner] Sombart called feudal economy traditional. Tradition is opposed to rationality, even though the one took shape in the other. Its medium is not consciousness but the pregiven, unreflected and binding existence of social forms — the actuality of the past; unintentionally this notion of binding existence was transmitted to the intellectual/spiritual sphere. Tradition in the strict sense is incompatible with bourgeois society. The principle of equal exchange, as in production, did not abolish that of the family. But it did subordinate the family to it. Frequent periods of inflation have demonstrated how obviously anachronistic the idea of inheritance has become, and intellectual inheritance was no less prone to crisis. In linguistic expressions for tradition this immediacy — from one hand to another — is merely a remnant within the social machinery of universal mediation, which is dominated by the commodity character of things. Technology long ago allowed us to forget the hand that created it and made it an extension of itself. In view of the technological modes of production, handicraft has as little substance as the concept of craftsmanship itself, which once ensured tradition, aesthetic tradition in particular.

In a radically bourgeois country like the US, all the consequences of this came to pass. Tradition became either a questionable value or an imported article to be valued only as a curiosity. The absence of traditional aspects of culture in the US and of those experiences linked with them thwarts a consciousness of temporal continuity. What fails to establish its immediate social usefulness in the market place does not count and is forgotten. Even when someone dies, it is as if he had never lived; he is as replaceable as anything functional. Only what has no function is irreplaceable! This explains the desperate

* Originally published as "Über Tradition," in "Inselalmanach auf das Jahr 1966." This collaborative translation is based on the text in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), Vol. X, Pt. 1, pp. 310-320.

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and archaic embalming rituals of the Americans. As if by magic, they would like to recapture the consciousness of time that has been lost, although this loss is rooted in social relations. Europe is not ahead of the US in this respect. It could learn tradition at home, but instead it follows the US of its own accord and in no sense needs to imitate it. Often noted in Germany, the crisis of historical consciousness, including the sheer ignorance even of the most recent past, is only a symptom of a more fundamental predicament. Manifestly, people are experiencing the breakdown of temporal continuity. The fact that time as a philosophical topic has become so popular indicates that it is vanishing from the spirit of the living; the Italian philosopher Enrico Castelli has written a book dealing with this problem. Contemporary art as a whole responds to this loss of tradition. Having lost what tradition guaranteed — the self-evident relation to its object, to its materials and techniques — it must reflect upon them from within. Art now senses the hollow and fictional character of traditional aspects of culture; important artists chip them away like plaster with a hammer. Whatever maintains an orientation to objectivity shares this hostility to tradition. To complain about it and to recommend tradition as a cure is entirely useless. This contradicts the very essence of tradition. Utilitarian rationality — the consideration of how nice it would be to have tradition in a world allegedly or actually lacking any coherence — cannot prescribe what it invalidates.

2

Tradition genuinely lost cannot be replaced aesthetically. But bourgeois society does precisely that, and its motives for doing so are genuine. The less the bourgeois principle tolerates otherness, the more urgently it appeals to tradition and cites what then appears from the outside as "value." It is obliged to do this because that reason which governs processes of production and reproduction and which presides over everything which merely comes into being or already exists is not the whole of reason. The thoroughly bourgeois Max Weber defined reason as the relation between means and ends, not of means as such; these he consigned to subjective, irrational decision. In the control of the few over the means of production and in the relentless conflicts this generates, the whole remains as unreasonable, fateful and threatening as it was always. The more rational the coherence and closure of the whole, the more dreadful becomes its power over the living as well the inability of their reason to change it. But if what subsists in such irrationality wants to justify its existence rationally it must seek support from the very irrationality it eradicates; it must turn to tradition which, of course, immediately recoils from this embrace and becomes false by the very appeal to it. Society applies tradition systematically like an adhesive; in art, it is held out as a pacifier to soothe peoples' qualms about their atomization, including temporal atomization. From the beginning of the bourgeois period, members of the third estate have sensed something lacking in their progress and their reason, which suppresses virtually all the qualitative distinctions of life. Its mainstream poets have mocked the *prix du*

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progrès from Molière's comedy "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*" to Gottfried Keller's Litumlei family, which bought fake ancestral portraits. Snobbery is immanent to a form of society wherein formal equality serves substantive inequality and domination. All literature which derides snobbery only conceals the wound on which it pours salt. Manipulated and neutralized by the bourgeois principle, tradition eventually turns into a toxin. As soon as genuine traditional aspects of culture — significant art works of the past — are idolized as relics they degenerate into elements of an ideology which relishes the past so that the present will remain unaffected by it, at the cost of increasing narrowness and rigidity. Those who cherish the past and refuse to surrender their love of it so as not to become impoverished, immediately expose themselves to an insidiously inspired misunderstanding, namely that they might not be so dedicated after all and might even be willing to embrace the present.

3

False tradition, which arose almost simultaneously with the consolidation of bourgeois society, wallows in false wealth. This wealth enticed the new romanticism even more than the old; even the concept of world literature, though certainly liberated from the confines of national literature, was tempted by it from the beginning. The wealth was false because it was utilized in the bourgeois spirit of manipulating property, as if the artist had access to whatever aesthetic materials and forms historicism authenticated as precious and refined, as if each and every tradition would surrender itself to the artist precisely because they are no longer substantial or binding.

Hegel defined the new art, which he called romantic, in just this way. Goethe did not resist the temptation of false wealth; only the allergy against tradition today is immune. Whereas everything appears to be at the service of the allegedly autonomous artist, no good can come from the treasures he has unearthed. As we know, those neo-classical orientations (in literature, those of [Jean] Cocteau and the later [André] Gide came to naught). Any artist who makes use of them fabricates arts and crafts. He borrows from culture what contradicts his own position — empty forms which cannot be filled because no authentic art has ever fulfilled its form. After tradition disintegrates, the artist experiences it much more through the resistance it puts up whenever he attempts to capture it. What today is called minimalism in the most diverse artistic media corresponds to the experience that nothing more need be used than what is necessary for the work here and now. The accelerating pace of change in aesthetic programs and trends, which the Philistine dismisses as fashionable nonsense, arises from the constantly increasing compulsion of the *refus* first noted by [Paul] Valéry. The relation to tradition is supplanted by a canon of prohibitions. More and more is engulfed by this canon as critical self-consciousness expands, including what is apparently eternal — norms borrowed either directly or indirectly from antiquity, which were mobilized in the bourgeois epoch to combat the dissolution of the traditional aspects of culture.

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4

While tradition is subjectively ruined or ideologically corrupted, history objectively maintains its hegemony over everything and over everything into which it has seeped. The positivist dogma (often difficult to distinguish from aesthetic objectivity) that the world is made up of what is immediately given, without the deeper dimension of what it became, is just as illusory as the authoritarian appeal to tradition. Whatever imagines itself to be derived from nothing, unadulterated by history, will be the first victim of history unconsciously and thus fatefully. Archaic ontological tendencies in philosophy are a case in point. The writer who shuns the deceptive aspects of tradition and assumes it no longer has anything to do with him still is constrained by it, above all through language. Literary language is not a random collection of markers. The value of each and every word, each and every combination of words objectively derives its meaning from its history and this history embraces the historical process as such. [Bertolt] Brecht once expected salvation from forgetting, which in the meantime has become an expression of mechanical emptiness. The poverty of the here and now has turned out to be nothing more than the abstract negation of false wealth, in many cases the apotheosis of bourgeois Puritanism. The passing moment, free of any trace of memory, suffers from the delusion that what is mediated socially is a natural form or raw material. However, any compromising sacrifices of historically established techniques are regressive. The truth of renunciation is not blind triumph but despair. The bliss of tradition praised by reactionaries is not only an ideology. Whoever suffers from the universal domination of what merely exists and yearns for what has never existed might well feel a greater affinity with a marketplace in Southern Germany than with a cofferdam even though he knows how much the restored buildings also preserve the stifling athmosphere inside them; their stale stuffiness is the complement of technological catastrophe. To insist on the absolute absence of tradition is as naive as the obstinate insistence on it. Both are ignorant of the past that persists in their allegedly pure relation to objects; both are unaware of the dust and debris which cloud their allegedly clear vision. But it is inhuman to forget because accumulated suffering will be forgotten and the historical trace on things, words, colors and sounds is always of past suffering. Thus tradition today poses an insoluble contradiction. There is no tradition today and none can be conjured, yet when every tradition has been extinguished the march toward barbarism will begin.

5

This antinomy prescribes the only possible relation between consciousness and tradition. Kant's assertion that the critical path alone remains open is one of those established maxims whose truth content is much greater than its original intent. It concerns not only the particular tradition of the rationalist school Kant renounced but tradition as a whole. Not to forget tradition and yet not to affirm it means to confront it with the most advanced stage of consciousness and

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to pose the question of what passes and what does not. There is no eternal canon; even the notion of a German literary anthology is no longer conceivable. But there is a relation to the past which, though not conservative, facilitates the survival of many works by refusing to compromise. Despite their restorative intentions, important traditionalists of the past generation like the members of the [Stefan] George school and [Hugo von] Hofmannsthal, [Rudolf] Borchardt and [Rudolf Alexander] Schröder grasped something of this feeling insofar as they preferred the sober and concise to the idealistic formulation. They already had an ear for what sounds hollow in a text. They registered the passage of tradition into unpretentiousness, into a position which no longer posits itself. They preferred those works in which the truth content is deeply embedded in the material to those in which it hovers over them like an ideology and thus is none at all. Nothing traditional is better suited than this subterranean tradition of anti-traditionalism to link up with the betrayed and reviled aspect of the Enlightenment in Germany. But even the respectable desire for restoration had to pay its dues. Its self-confidence became the pretext for an entire genre of sophisticated writing. The high-principled imitators of [Adalbert] Stifter and interpreters of [Johann Peter] Hebel are today as common as the grandiose gesture. Not only were ostensibly innocent gestures incorporated in the general manipulation of sanctioned cultural products, even significant older works were destroyed in the rescue operation. They refused to be restored to what they once were. Objectively — not only in reflected consciousness — these works shed various layers according to their own dynamics. This process alone inaugurates a tradition worth pursuing. Its criterion is *correspondance* which, as something new, throws light on the present and receives its illumination from the past. Such *correspondance* is not synonymous with empathy and immediate affinity but requires distance. Bad traditionalism is distinguished from tradition's moment of truth in that it reduces distance and reaches for the irretrievable, which begins to speak only in the consciousness of irretrievability. [Samuel] Beckett's admiration for [Theodor Fontane's] "Effi Briest" is a model of genuine affinity through distance. It evidences how little tradition conceived in terms of the concept of *correspondance* tolerates what is traditional as a model.

6

The critical approach to tradition never says "this no longer interests us," which is nothing other than the impertinent subsumption of the present under a loose historical category like mannerism, which surreptitiously adopts the attitude: "We've seen it all before." Such dispositions reduce everything to nothing. They pander to superstitions of an uninterrupted historical continuity and thus affirm the historical verdict; they conform. Where this peculiarity with respect to the past has become second nature, as in the reception of [Heinrich] Ibsen and [Frank] Wedekind, one ignores what is left unrealized, historically undeveloped or, as in the case of the liberation of women, remains merely

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ambivalent. But such idiosyncracies touch upon the true theme of rethinking tradition — that which was left along the way, passed over or overpowered, that which is "out of date." What is alive in tradition seeks refuge there and not in the permanence of works which have stood the test of time. All this eludes the sovereign perspective of historicism in which the superstition of immortality fatally combines with the petty fear of what is old-fashioned. The vitality of a work is lodged deep within, under layers concealed in earlier phases which manifest themselves only when others have withered and fallen away. Everything ephemeral in Wedekind's "Spring's Awakening" — the student desks, the dimly lit lavatories in 19th century homes, the unspeakable river outside of town at dusk, the tea which the mother brings the children on a tray, the chatter of teenage girls about the engagement of the assistant forester Pfälle — forms an image of something that has always been and will always be, but only after the appeals of the play — for modern enlightenment and the tolerance of youth — have long been fulfilled and no longer matter. What renders Wedekind's judgement obsolete is the insight into the substance of the object which allows for its reactualization. Only an attitude which raises tradition to consciousness without succumbing to it is able to deal with this. Just as tradition must be shielded from the fury of disappearance, so it must be wrested from its no less mythical authority.

7

The critical relation to tradition as the medium of its preservation is not only concerned with the past but also with the quality of aesthetic production in the present. To the extent that it is authentic, this production does not begin cavalierly from scratch, nor does it attempt to outdo one contrived method with another. Rather, it is a determinate negation. In Beckett's plays the traditional form of the drama is transformed in all respects through parody. The dreadful games in which rubber weights are lifted for deadly serious comic effect and in the end everything remains the same as it was at the beginning correspond to conceptions of rising and falling action, of vicissitude, catastrophe, the development of character. Such categories are the illusory superstructure suspended above what becomes the real source of fear and suffering — the unchanging nature of existence. The collapse of this superstructure in the literal performance of its critique on stage provides the material and content of a dramatic art which does not want to know what it is saying. To this extent, the cliché of the anti-drama is not a bad choice, nor is the concept of the anti-hero. Beckett's key figures are only shivering scarecrows, which are all that remains of the subject which once dominated the scene. Their clowning passes judgment on the ideal of the self-righteous personality, which perishes quite deservedly in Beckett's plays. To characterize Beckett's works and those of his followers as "the drama of the absurd" is certainly inadequate — it concedes all too much to the very conventional wisdom on trial here, and it does so because it designates as absurd not the objective senselessness this art exposes

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but its subjective perspective. Conscious agreement seeks to swallow even what it finds distasteful. Nevertheless, the awkward designation "absurd" is not completely incorrect. It considers progressive literature to be the concretely executed critique of the traditional concept of meaning — that the world makes sense — which so-called high art used to affirm even and especially when it chose tragedy as its law. The affirmative character of tradition is collapsing. By the very fact of its existence, tradition claims that temporal succession sustains and transmits meaning. To the extent that it has value, the new literature (analogous to the new music and painting) radically unsettles the ideology of meaning which was so thoroughly unmasked in the catastrophe that it even cast doubt on the meaningfulness of the past as well. It renounces tradition and follows it nevertheless. It takes Hamlet's question "To be or not to be" so literally that it dares to provide the answer — not to be, for which tradition has as little room as do fairy tales for the victory of the monster over the prince. This type of productive critique does not even require philosophical reflection because it obtains through the skill of the artist and is in tune with his precise sensitivities and technical control, both of which are replete with historical experience. Each of Beckett's minimalist reductions — down to the structure of language and the spiteful jokes — presupposes the very platitude and differentiation he refuses to let die in trash cans, sand piles and urns. This corresponds to the dissatisfaction of modern novelists with the fiction of an omniscient narrator. Tradition goes against the grain of every artist irritated by its ornamental character and its fabrication of meaning where there is none. Each remains true to this meaning by refusing to be deceived by it.

8

The relation between authentic works and critique is no less dialectical than that between authors and critique. As little as a poet needed to be a philosopher, as little need he become one if this implies confusing the inflated meaning of a work (rightly and horrendously dubbed "its message") with its truth content. Beckett passionately rejects any reflection on the allegedly symbolic character of his productions — the point is that no positive substance can be observed. Nevertheless, something substantial has changed in the approach of authors to their work. The fact that they neither can locate themselves in tradition nor function in a vacuum destroys the concept of artistic naiveté so intimately related to tradition. Historical consciousness is concentrated in the indispensable reflection on what is and what is no longer possible, on the clear insight into techniques and materials and how they fit together. This radically disposes of the sloppiness [Gustav] Mahler equated with tradition. However, tradition also survives in the anti-traditional consciousness of what has been rendered historically obsolete. The relation of the artist to his work has become at once totally blind and totally transparent. The assumption that one may now speak plainly and without constraint is entirely traditional; under the delusion of the immediacy of individuality, it can only result in a kind

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of writing that is no longer possible. But this does not represent the triumph of the sentimentally reflective artist that has been contrasted with the naive artist in aesthetic understanding since classicism and romanticism. He becomes the object of a second reflection which revokes his right to posit meaning, his right to the "idea" that idealism once granted him. To this extent progressive aesthetic consciousness converged with the naive artist, whose non-conceptual intuition never had any pretensions to meaning. Perhaps this is why it succeeded from time to time. But even this hope can no longer be relied on. Poetry redeems its truth content only when it repels tradition at its closest point of contact. Whoever seeks to avoid betraying the bliss which tradition still promises in some of its images and the possibilities buried beneath its ruins must abandon that tradition which turns possibilities and meanings into lies. Only that which inexorably denies tradition may once again retrieve it.

*Tradition?**

Alain de Benoist

There are many ways to understand tradition. Its etymology is Latin, from the verb *tradere*, which means "to give, to hand in, to transmit directly." Originally tradition designated "that which is transmitted" and it had a religious meaning. Tradition understood as "the action of transmitting" was nevertheless in common usage in France up to the end of the 18th century and is still part of today's legal lexicon. Yet *tradere* has also meant "betray," in the sense of delivering up a man or a secret. In the plural, traditions are generally considered as forming part of the distinctive features of a culture in a particular period. They evoke a body of accepted and immutable hereditary characteristics inherited from the past: customs, ways of being, but also celebrations, work cycles, and popular traditions. Tradition here implies a sense of duration: it contrasts with novelty, even if one accepts its evolution. It also implies the idea of standard or norm, even if the traditions in question can be challenged. Tradition

* Originally published in *Krisis* 3, special issue on "Tradition?" (September 1989), pp. 2-9. Translated by Ali Bernard Haddou.

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encompasses what is permanent and immutable, as opposed to the succession of events and fashions. An older definition describes it as marking the submission of the living to the authority of the dead, encompassing accepted customs and habits (we obey traditions because we always have) that modern people denounce as conventions, prejudices or superstitions. The term can have a positive or pejorative meaning, depending on the context in which it is used. When advertisers and tourist offices extol the virtues of "traditional craftsmanship," they implicitly refer to a tried set of values and know-how. Tradition here evokes quality and authenticity. But it may also be seen as what is outmoded, as in the modernist critics' use of "traditional morality."

But there is another meaning to the word tradition, articulated by the representatives of traditional thought. Here the term is singular and has a capital T: Tradition. The first name that comes to mind is that of René Guénon (1886-1951), who published his *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* in 1921 and died thirty years later in Cairo under the pseudonym Abdel Wahed Yahia.[1] Julius Evola's *Revolt Against the Modern World* appeared in 1934. Other names are Arturo Reghini, Guido De Giorgio and Attilo Mordini,[2] Frithjof Schuon, whose writings began to appear in 1933 in *Etudes Traditionelles*, Michel Valsn, Titus Burckhardt, Ananda N. Coormaraswamy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Marco Pallis, Martin Lings and Philip Sherrard.

In defining this school of thought, the word "traditionalism" (which appeared in France only in the middle of the 19th century) may lend itself to misunderstandings the representatives of traditional thought have been the first to denounce.[3] René Guénon qualifies as "traditionalists" those who "have only one sort of tendency or aspiration toward Tradition, without any real knowledge of it."[4] Guido de Giorgio presents an even more radical opinion. "Tradition is absolutely different from traditionalism: one is an eternally fecund living patrimony, rich with infinite potentialities in all times and circumstances . . . . the other is but sterile residue, an inefficient, self-enclosing concreteness impossible to adapt and lacking all energetic and creative force. Tradition is clearly opposed to traditionalism, just as truth is opposed to commonplaces."[5]

The word "traditionalism" contains yet another ambiguity. The way it is used by the representatives of traditional thought could be confused with

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1. Guénon's three fundamental works are *Orient and Occident* (1924), *La crise du monde moderne* (1927) and *Le regne de la quantité et les signes des temps* (1945).

2. Arturo Reghini, founder of the Italian Theosophical Society, editor of the journal *Atanor*, translator of Agrippa de Nettesheim's *De occulta philosophia*, introduced Guénon to Evola. Guido de Giorgio (1890-1957) also collaborated with Evola in the journals *Ur* and *La Torre*. For more on Mordini (1923-1966), see Carlo Fabrizio Carli, *Attilio Mordini, il Cattolico Ghibellino* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 1989).

3. "Integral traditionalism" has also been discussed. See Karlheinz Weissmann, "Vom Geist der Überlieferung. Die Lehre von der *integralen Tradition*," in *Etappe* 2 (October 1988), pp. 79-90.

4. *Le regne de la quantité et les signes du temps*, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

5. *L'instant et l'eternite et autres textes sur la tradition* (Milan: Arche, 1987), p. 148.

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counter-revolutionary political traditionalism or with Catholic traditionalism, sometimes referred to as "integral," which is hostile to "progressivism" within the Church, to liturgical reform and to newer "modernist" theologies. If the school of traditional thought is perfectly counter-revolutionary, it is so in a way very different from those who claim to be linked politically to the Counter-Revolution. While some of the school's adherents call themselves Catholics (or at least accord Catholicism a privileged place with respect to Tradition in general) others do not. Some even affirm themselves as anti-Christian. Mario Polia states: "Considering it more closely, 'Catholic traditionalism' is an ambiguous expression, as if being Catholic were only a specification of a more general and absolute category: 'traditionalism.' It is equally unsatisfactory to speak of 'traditionalist Catholicism', giving the expression the sense of 'traditional', for it either presupposes the parallel and antithetical possibility of a Catholicism outside of tradition or, by defining 'traditionalism' as the 'traditional interpretation' of Catholicism, reserves for the traditionalist movements the prerogative of being the only true Catholicism. Traditionalist movements would then assume the prerogative of *being* Catholicism. To speak of 'traditional Catholicism' does not make much sense, either because one cannot define Catholicism in terms of Tradition, or because it presupposes an anti-traditional type of Catholicism."[6] In fact, there is much difference between, for example, a traditionalist like Marcel Lefebvre and a "Christian traditionalist" like Attilo Mordini.

In seeking to define the "Indo-European tradition," Jean Haudry speaks of a "constituted literary heritage, essentially of formulas and schemes expressing and transmitting a concept of the world that guides individual actions and that can be materialized within institutions."[7] Such a definition, with its reference to a "literary" origin, obviously does not conform to what traditional thought understands by Tradition. According to this school, Tradition cannot be defined through sociological or cultural data, nor can it be appreciated in purely human terms. Tradition is not the body of customs but rather that which derives from the *philosophia perenis*.[8] Far from encompassing a body of observed and accepted rules, it constitutes a *doctrine* voluntarily and consciously transmitted as principles — a series of transcendental truths of permanent worth and of non-human origin. According to traditional thought, tradition is only secondarily cultural. At most, it can be said to *inspire* certain cultural or social activities. It is fundamentally spiritual, possesses a religious character and implies the metaphysical. Taking it as unique or 'primordial' and anterior to all local traditions. Tradition becomes a metaphysical doctrine — drawing on knowledge of ultimate, invariable and universal principles. It is not a human invention but a supra-human 'gift' manifesting the existence of a

6. "Tradizione. Il significato di un Termine," in *I Quaderni di Avallon* 10 (January-April 1986).

7. *Etudes indo-europeenes* (December 19, 1986), p. 2.

8. This expression, often attributed to Leibniz, probably comes from Augustinus Steuchus' book, *De perinni philosophia*, published in 1540 and read by Leibniz.

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superior order of reality. On this point, all are unanimous. For Antonio Medrano, Tradition must be understood as "a sacred articulation of reality based on metaphysical principles." Frithjof Schuon, who espouses the principle of the "transcendental unity" of all religions, sees in Tradition a body of truths principally uniting "all that is human to a divine reality." Guénon connects Tradition with metaphysics, defining it as "suprarational knowledge, intuitive and immediate."

Thus conceived, Tradition is defined as a coherent body of intangible and sacred principles imposed on all which *delineates* the essential rules of conduct, allowing man to accede to the supra-human level, allowing the *homo* to detach from the *humus*, to pass from the terrestrial to the celestial order. In this light, the transmission of Tradition from generation to generation obviously plays an essential role. Mario Polia writes: "There is Tradition — in the spiritual sense — only if there is the 'transmission' of a truth of metaphysical (not simply cultural) order embodied in a doctrinal system, transmitted and guarded by a spiritually qualified hierarchy, encompassing the possibility of acceding to such truth through 'spiritual' or 'religious' means. In addition, a tradition must ensure a qualified and uninterrupted transmission through time from the source to the beneficiary, and the continuance of liturgical, ritualistic and "sacrificial" practices, without which transmission would become a purely cultural variable.[9]

Symbolic language is thus quintessentially traditional. Just as myth is beyond events and a properly historical significance, the symbol, contrary to allegory, is beyond words and semantic definition. Seeking to manifest the inexpressible, it communicates the abstract by transfiguring it into an always provisional and imperfectly concrete representation. It arouses affectivity in the body as much as in the mind. D.H. Lawrence said in *Apocalypse*: "Symbols are organic entities of conscience that have their own life: one can never exhaust their meaning, because they have a dynamic emotional value to the sensorial conscience of the body and spirit that is more than just intellectual."

Above all, symbolic language constitutes the main path of analogical thinking that, by expressing correspondences between different levels of reality, simultaneously unveils the unity of the world and the subtle complementarity of the One and the Many. Reasoning by analogy can establish *qualitative* correspondences between these levels of reality and situate the backgrounds of meaning corresponding to symbols. Guénon evokes this "law of correspondence, which is the very foundation of all symbolism and by virtue of which each thing, while proceeding from a single metaphysical principle which guarantees its reality, translates or expresses this principle in its own way and according to its order of existence, such that all things are drawn together and correspond from one order to the next."[10] According to the traditional outlook, the idea of *non-separation* is essential. "What is below is like what is above. Miracles are performed from

9. "Tradizione: il Significato di un Termine," *op. cit.*
10. *Le symbolisme de la croix* (Paris: Vega, 1931), p. 12.

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one and the same thing," according to the famed *Emerald Table* of Hermes Trismegistus. The city of men must reproduce the harmony pervading the city of God or expressed in the well ordered cosmos. Similarly, Meister Eckhart writes: "The eye with which I see myself and the eye with which God sees Himself are one and the same" (Sermon 12), and Goethe adds: "What is inside is also outside." For Raymond Abellio, the gnosis is also defined as a vision of universal interdependence, challenging the idea that there are separate beings or phenomena, though they may be distinct (union without confusion). This universal interdependence, says Abellio, implies an "intentionality of the world." Being general, it can be applied to emotions as well as thoughts. Nothing — no thing, no person — can claim to be autonomous in the absolute.

This "holistic" vision is traditional in esotericism. From the viewpoint of traditional thought, the difference between esoteric and exoteric levels is also fundamental. One can say that Tradition constitutes the esoteric aspect of a spiritual reality. In their more immediately perceivable forms, institutionalized religions then express the esoteric aspect of this spiritual reality. Here esotericism should be taken in the sense of *initiation* and not the occult, which the school considers more a phenomenon of decadence or "counter-initiation." Abellio states that esotericism dispels interior darkness just as positive knowledge dispels exterior darkness. He adds that transcendental interior darkness does not proceed from an opposition or a duality between consciousness and the world but from a correlation between the world and consciousness of our own consciousness. "This genetive encapsulates the secret of esotericism. One must consider it in its immediate genetic function: it serves to generate another consciousness. Hence the deep meaning of what we call initiation, which is the awakening of consciousness to its own transcendental self-consciousness."[11] This consciousness of consciousness, grounded in the internalized perception of external perception, is by definition fundamentally "self-intensifying." Esotericism is the mode of knowledge and activity whereby man seeks to situate himself from a viewpoint which is no longer merely human.

Traditional thought, which began to develop seriously in the 1920s, has devoted itself to restoring order to the "occultist" jumble of the preceding century. It is a modern version of Oswald Spengler's "second religiosity." This demand for rigor undoubtedly distances it radically from false spiritualities and the "religious" pseudo-syncretisms of which the New Age doctrine is an extreme example. The boundary, however, is not always as clear cut as desired. Should we treat the problems of sacredness and spirituality in general, as they are found within different religions? Should we speak of traditionalisms that do not conform to the traditional doctrine as we have defined it and which may be directly opposed to it? Where should the "theocratic" ideas of a Bonald, a Donoso Cortès or a Joseph de Maistre be placed? How can we

11. *L'esprit moderne et la tradition*, preface to Paul Serant. *Au seuil de 1 'esoterisme*, (Paris: Grasset, 1955), p. 18.

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avoid evoking the question of gnosis, as posed by Jean Borella, Raymond Ruyer and Raymond Abellio? Traditional thought emphasizes the study of myths and symbols. Jung and de Bachelar, Roger Caillois and perhaps also Réné Daumal immediately come to mind, as do the historical studies of religion by Mircea Eliade and the works on "myth analysis" and studies of the imaginary by Gibert Durand and various other contemporaries inspired by Jung. The traditional school also has its great ancestors, from Plato to Pericles, Meister Eckhart and many others. Should we also refer to the studies of Frederic Tristan and Antoine Faivre on hermetic philosophy and alchemy, and those of Jacob Böhme and Swedenborg about occultist masonry and the cabbala? Finally, how can we not also consider Islam, to which many of the school's major representatives have turned? Little by little, one touches on the history of religions, mysticism, esotericism, even psychoanalysis, and the risk is therefore great from Annie Besant to Blavasky, from Rudolf Steiner to Krishnamurti, from Gurdjieff to Aurobindo, to arrive at a syncretism interested in all and feeding off anything (from holistic medicine to transcendental meditation, from popular astrology to runic divination, etc.). By keeping to the exposition of the fundamental themes of traditional thought, we have attempted to focus on and elucidate a few contiguous subjects.

Would Julius Evola's denunciation of the "modern world" be as scandalous today, when criticism of modernity comes from all sides? The Greens question productivism. Post-modernists want to abolish the grandiose historicist narratives of legitimation. From Left and Right, modernism as the rule of individualism, as the atomization of the world, as the triumph of the values of the market, as the dictatorial hegemony of the economy and money is being challenged. Felix Guatarri has recently written: "We focus our attention on impending catastrophes, while the true catastrophes are already here, under our noses, with the degeneration of social practices, with the mass media's numbing effect, with a collective will blinded by the ideology of the 'market', in other words, succumbing to the law of the masses, to entropy, to the loss of singularity, to a general and collective infantilization. The old types of social relations, the old relations with sex, with time, with the cosmos, with human finitude have been rattled, not to say devastated, by the 'progress' generated by industrial firms."[12] Clearly stated: the ideology of progress is crumbling. Novelty is no longer to be interpreted as increased well-being. It may well be that it is generally regressive and that we are living out the end of a cycle.

It is not surprising for the representatives of traditional thought who, in criticizing modernity, exhibit a radicalism difficult to surpass. Generally adhering to a cyclic conception of history, the school affirms that, within each cycle, humanity runs a course leading inexorably from a state of perfection and simplicity to a state of spiritual decline and accentuated materialism. The history of humanity is interpreted as "metaphysical entropy," as fall, degradation

12. *Liberation* (June 30, 1989).

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from an original primordial state. All traditional authors see in modern times the time of *Kali-Yuga* [in Hinduism, the present age of the world, full of conflicts and sin], the apogee of the blackest age, the terminal phase of the cycle, the *ne plus ultra* of spiritual decline. The conflict between Tradition and anti-Tradition in fact crystallizes itself in decadence, and it is this decadence that the decadents call "progress". The opposition between traditional thought and the ideology of progress is therefore total, while being perfectly symmetrical (but inversely). All that modern consciousness analyses and perceives as progress, the school interprets as decline: the Renaissance was a fall (decline); the Enlightenment, a darkening.

For Guénon, the crisis of the modern world is essentially explained by the weakening and extinction of principles that originally inspired the institutions and, afterwards, by the multiplication of structures charged with remedying the situation. These structures bring about the proliferation of abstract and contradictory rules, such that finally "the contradictions proper to the institutional system overcome the satisfaction that it is supposed to afford."[13] Again, nothing is separated: the spiritual level falls as the material level rises, the maintenance of quality (in all areas) is incompatible with the dominance of quantity. Social life becomes mechanical and abstract as the very result of the dissolution of organic and concrete communities. Secularization — the disenchantment of the world (Max Weber's *Entzauberung*), social atomization, the materialist hegemony of traded goods, the primacy of the principle of reason (an exclusively technical and reductionist reason), all the phenomena characteristic of the contemporary world — proceed (according to the school) from a sole logic that must be understood as the end of a secular and probably millenary *involution*. The ultimate effect of the hegemony of the principle of subjective individuation is the death of God, which entails the death of man and allows for, in the best case, only the self-consciousness of the radical void which constitutes the truth of an ego separated from the world and of the nonsense of a social life without finality, completely enclosed in the race for growth and the negation of being in exchange for material possessions.

The modern world is thus perceived first and foremost as distraction: literally, it diverts man away from the essential and keeps him in a state of a perpetual estrangement that prevents him from returning to and regrounding himself authentically. We must search for sense in a world which no longer seems to make sense. We have almost become incapable of understanding even the meaning of the word, "sense." Guénon writes: "If all men understood what the modern world truly is, it would cease to exist." Nihilism is also *put to the test*.

13. Jean Borella, "René Guénon et la crise du monde moderne" in *Connaissance des religions* (June 1989), p. 15.

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The Actuality of Traditions

Paul Piccone

The Politics of Authenticity

Something fundamental has changed in politics since the 1960s. So far, however, its meaning has yet to be fully understood. As is often the case, art is ahead of theory[1] as "the new politics" have already become the object of some provocative aesthetic representations. Thus recent films such as *The Crying Game* tackle these new developments in all their contradictoriness and manage to grasp the main contours of the predicament, including the inadequacy of conventional liberal responses. In *The Crying Game* the new politics triumphs, but only by exacting a high price: the hero manages to assert his "real" self at the cost of a long jail sentence. True to the tragedy-form, the message is that the practice of the new politics within the old institutional framework entails serious personal consequences. The hero, an IRA terrorist deeply involved in the "old politics" of abstract ideological struggles and paramilitary confrontations, fails in his mission against an equally abstract and distant British enemy and runs away to hide in London's urban anonymity. During this drifting, he seeks out and becomes romantically involved with the former lover of a British soldier he had taken prisoner and killed accidentally in the unfolding of the destructive logic of the old politics. To his dismay, the hero finds that his potential new lover is . . . a transvestite. The initial shock and revulsion, however, gradually recede as a result of irresistible homoerotic attraction to the point of precipitating a catharsis concerning his traditional sexual "prejudices." Thus, when the agents of the old politics resurface to reclaim him, he can no longer wholeheartedly rejoin them. The eventual traumatic break

1. Rare efforts to grasp the new state of affairs tend to flounder in the presumption of academia as the only meaningful political arena, traditional victimological dogma, and the inability to escape a Manichean swamp of worn dichotomies such as universalism vs. particularism or Left vs. Right. Consequently, they end up bemoaning the Left's forfeiture of its universalist ideals to a mythological ever-resurgent Right, within a context of general Left ideological disintegration. What these scholastic exercises in the subsumption of the qualitatively new to discredited eschatological narratives miss is the *novelty* of the new political situation, possibly prefiguring the closing of the liberal era — an era the Left has systematically misunderstood. See, e.g., Todd Gitlin, "The Rise of 'Identity Politics'," in *Dissent* (Spring 1993), pp. 172-177. Superficial glorifications of "life politics," such as Giddens, altogether miss all the major political implications of these politics in a futile exercise in political correctness. See Chapter 7 of Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 208-231.

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results in a series of catastrophic misunderstandings culminating in the now jealous transvestite killing the female IRA agent (also the hero's former lover) sent to attempt first to re-engage and then, having failed, to discipline the hero for deserting the cause. Out of guilt for having embroiled the transvestite in the whole mess and as the final acknowledgment of a no longer repressed true love for him, the hero ends up taking the blame for the murder.

Besides merely questioning the fixity of allegedly artificially-imposed sexual identities and integrating within mainstream popular culture hitherto excluded marginal themes, the film's more substantial implication is that politics has now become deeply personal. As such, it implicitly rejects the old liberal distinction between public and private, which confined politics primarily to the public sphere. The hero eventually finds self-realization by recognizing and living his "true nature" rather than, as in the old politics, through involvement in an ideological cause concerned with national, religious, ethnic or class-grounded objectives. This is paradigmatic of a whole series of recent developments. It is as if the old 1960s Maoist slogan that the private is the public has suddenly translated into a collective "outing," as it has been renamed by gay activists, and has become the password of post-communist "emancipatory" politics.[2] To the extent that the gays' emphasis on the explicit expression of one's "true" sexuality as a precondition for living an "authentic" life in an appropriately sensitized new social setting not only politicizes the private lives of those willing to do so but also coerces other reluctant homosexuals — through "outing" — to politicize their own private lives, it is paradigmatic of the potentially authoritarian character of the new politics. In accordance with the debilitating dynamics of Adorno's "identity logic," having defined gay identity in a particularly unambiguous and militant fashion, gay "activists" seek to force such a concept on a social reality not always amenable to it. Thus, far from merely advocating "tolerance" for "diversity," as the liberal mass media invariably presents it, the

2. This is reminiscent of what in the late 1950s C. Wright Mills called "the sociological imagination." Unlike recent conformist efforts to force a politicization of the private *within* the logic of liberalism, Mills saw the development of the sociological imagination as a challenge to this logic: a prelude at that time to still undefined qualitative socio-political alternatives. In other words, Mills' sociological imaginaton — calling for the translation of private problems into public issues and therefore transcending the existing public-private distinction — presupposed a *radical break* with, rather than conformist integration within, the predominant liberal framework. See his *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press,1959). As Horowitz put it in one of the few correct insights in his otherwise confused and misleading biography of Mills, by the late 1950s Mills' "animosity toward liberalism and his rejection of this 'creed' . . . was complete." See Irving Louis Horowitz, *C. Wright Mills: An American Utopian* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), p. 186. For a critique of Horowitz and a more balanced account of Mills, see John Alt, "Reclaiming C. Wright Mills," in *Telos* 66 (Winter 1985-86), pp. 6-43. For a misleading interpretation of Mills as "a radical liberal," see Rick Tillman, *C. Wright Mills: A Native Radical and His American Intellectual Roots* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), p. 188ff.

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new politics seeks to totalize its designated constituency and impose its new social agenda by means of super-legality, i.e., by primarily *moral* rather than *democratic* means. Consequently, its main political tools are expressive rather than discursive: public demonstrations and civil disobedience rather than persuasion and discussion. While in *The Crying Game* the new politics remains deeply personal, with the hero bearing exclusively the costs of his new political choices, in the broader geopolitical context the costs are generalized and imposed on reluctant heterogeneous constituencies still relatively comfortable within the logic of the old democratic politics. Under the cloak of advocating "tolerance" — a particularistic liberal political category exhibiting no inherent cultural universality — the new politics seeks to legislate personal behavior. Thus questionable political programs such as the "rainbow curriculum" proposed for New York public schools were to be *mandatory*, coercing Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox Jews and fundamental Protestants to accept as "normal" forms of behavior their religions condemn as profoundly wrong.

Radical gay politics is only part of a broader and tendentially totalitarian phenomenon expressed, with equally disruptive results, in the resurgence of Christian and Muslim fundamentalism as well as the various nationalisms within the ruins of the former Soviet Empire, most of Africa and Asia, and even Canada.[3] It is the unexpected vindication traditional Critical Theory (1930-70) advocated (but could not carry out) of that human particularity the culture industry, the state and the market sought to homogenize at least since the New Deal and the advent of post-entrepreneurial capitalism. In other words, it signals the end of that project of a one-dimensional society seeking to turn human beings in flesh and blood into predictable consumers, interchangeable deskilled workers and passive clients. Far from unambiguously entailing "social emancipation," however, when opportunistically integrated within the logic of liberal democracy as artificial negativity ultimately meant to regulate and relegitimate existing power relations, this development threatens to bring about the functional equivalent of the 17th century's religious wars, which Hobbes correctly described as the *raison d'être* of the modern state.[4] "Outing" ultimately means

3. See Frederick Johnstone, "Quebeckers, Mohawks and Zulus: Liberal Federalism and Fair Trade"; Mike McConkey, "Individuals, Communities and Federalism — Reply to Johnstone"; and Paul Piccone: "The Case Against Liberal Federalism and Protectionism," all in *Telos* 93 (Fall 1992), pp. 2-42.

4. The roots of classical liberalism in the religious civil wars are often forgotten, with the results that the extremely successful historical compromise it institutionalized between *privatized* diversity and the *public* sphere of politics is no longer appreciated as its essence by today's born-again liberals (mostly ex-Marxists) advocating multiculturalism as the politicization of cultural particularities. Even conservative critics seeking to emphasize the primacy and viability of religion within liberalism by privileging Tocqueville's position on the subject over all others miss the nature of the essential relation between religion and liberalism. This relation has nothing to do with whatever socially desirable role religion may play in the US but with the constitutional political legitimation of religious heterogeneity *outside* the public political sphere and with the Protestant axiological

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the coercive mobilization of designated "communities" and *organic integration* of hitherto private sexual, religious, ethnic, linguistic, etc. particularities within the public sphere and the consequent collapse of the hitherto sharp public-private distinction. In the same way that militant gays are increasingly unwilling to relegate their sexuality to the private domain or tolerate closet gays, today fundamentalists are no longer resigned to contain their absolute values within their particular congregations, while newly resurgent nationalist or tribal groups seek to invent, rediscover or reconstitute hitherto suppressed or marginalized ethnic particularities. The next step, of course, is that all these groups attempt to translate these particularities into general social policy whenever the state has become so weak or so corrupt as to be unable or unwilling to prevent it. But to the extent that it was precisely the institutionalization of the public-private distinction (allegedly relegating these idiosyncrasies exclusively to the private domain) which made classical liberalism possible, these new politics of authenticity ultimately present a major challenge to an always inherently self-contradictory but hitherto manageable liberal democracy[5] predicated on the old notion of "citizenship," constitutionality and a collectively binding legal system. From the viewpoint of the new politics, the human being previously reduced to the "citizen," the fundamental values originally frozen into constitutional principles and the allegedly universal norms embodied in laws and regulations are no longer comfortable within the traditional liberal compromise and have burst onto the public sphere to redefine *fin de siècle* political life. While its most spectacular current manifestations remain largely conformist in their uncritical acceptance of the institutional *status quo*, or even reactionary in their efforts to restore the political *status quo ante* obtaining prior to the rise of liberalism,[6] the new politics may also pave the way for other traditional, but in the present context rather radical federal alternatives: the reconstitution of federated clusters of particularistic, territorially-defined post-liberal communities around new traditional frameworks predicated on demographic and axiological heterogeneity and new organic modes of social interaction.

What is ultimately at stake with the new politics of authenticity is a widespread

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foundations of liberal democracy. For a conformist account relegitimating religion as a social pillar of liberalism while entirely missing the point about its real *political* relation, see Richard Sherlock and Roger Barrus, "The Problem of Religion in Liberalism," in *Interpretation*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Spring 1993), pp. 285-308.

5. See Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. by Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

6. Notwithstanding the *insurrectional* posturing of academic multiculturalists and other new politics advocates, their position is absolutely no threat to the *status quo* — so much so that the ideology of diversity has become official US corporate policy (probably under the intimidation of US government law suits). See Heather McDonald, "The Diversity Industry," in *The New Republic* (July 5, 1993), pp. 22-25. The counterproductive impact of this state of affairs is not hard to imagine: the resentment and hostility it generates tends to rekindle much of the racial animosity gradually eroded by years of interaction among various "diverse" groups.

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longing for the retotalization of life beyond the fragmentation and formalization institutionalized after the French and American revolutions paved the way for the gradual but inexorable spread of *mass* democracy and the concomitant legalitarianism Savigny warned about in the mid-19th century, resulting from the rejection of traditional European jurisprudence.[7] Unfortunately, the irreversible axiological heterogeneity of the present social contexts within which these new politics seek to unfold rules out one of their fundamental objectives — their earlier unreconstituted and often mythological organicity — and plunges them into irresolvable conflicts with other competing politics of authenticity which no totalizing "rainbow coalition" could possibly reconcile.[8] Without this organicity, "authentic" particularity remains abstract and unfulfilled or, worse yet, marginalized as another irrelevant and superficial attribute. In other words, to the extent that this particularity is not and cannot ever be a "concrete universal" in the old Hegelian sense, i.e., an instantiation of genuine universality, it is bound to clash with all other particularities seeking similarly one-sided organic objectifications. The result is a *bellum omnium contra omnes* requiring the relegitimation of the allegedly neutral liberal state as the universal mediator needed to keep law and order.

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7. For a critique of legal positivism, legaliterianism, motorized legislation and super-legality, see Carl Schmitt, "The Plight of European Jurisprudence," in *Telos* (Spring 1990), pp. 35-70.

8. Originally formulated within an implicit Marxist framework presupposing (what else?) "capital" as the totalizing collective enemy, "rainbow coalitions" could never move beyond a vague sense of solidarity impossible to translate into a meaningful program acceptable to any of the constituting conflicting sub-groups. For a fuller elaboration of this argument, see Paul Piccone, "Artificial Negativity as a Bureaucratic Tool? Reply to Roe," in *Telos* 86 (Winter 1990-91), pp. 127-140. These coalitions made sense only as the vision of an alternative managerial elite seeking to disempower capital and market mechanisms in favor of a centralized redistributive apparatus which, in earlier and more honest times, used to go under the name of "socialism" — something increasingly unfashionable after the collapse of the Soviet empire and the growing fiscal crises of both social democracy and the welfare state. It is not difficult to see the authoritarian predicament a "rainbow coalition" administration would confront in having to reconcile a multiplicity of irreconcilable politics of authenticity within a single socio-political agenda. If the old 1920s concept of "corporations" is substituted for the various "particular cultures," then multiculturalism becomes isomorphic with . . . classical fascist theory as developed by Giuseppe Bottai, Giovanni Gentile, etc. If, on the other hand, these various cultures are "modernized," i.e., forcibly homogenized out of their peculiar cultural particularity, such a strategy would have to rely on coercive means. In this respect, Stalinism was more than a mere aberration within an allegedly humanitarian socialist system. For an insightful discussion of this unavoidable predicament of "really existing socialism," see Ferenc Feher, "The Dictatorship over Needs," in *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 31-42. Multiculturalism promises to solve all these problems by deploying an abstract concept of "tolerance" enforced, if necessary, sensitizing administrative measures (e.g., court-ordered therapy for "deviants"). Presumably modern psychology can succeed in homogenizing everyone into officially certified "human beings" where the market, the state and the culture industry have hitherto failed.

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The liberal advocacy of "diversity" seeks to meet this challenge. It cannot possibly do so, however, since in order to fulfill this task the liberal-democratic state would have to present itself as "neutral" — something it cannot do since, as secularized Protestantism, liberalism presupposes a whole series of buried particularistic axiological premises.[9] Notions such as individual freedom, private property, constitutionally guaranteed rights, etc. are not unproblematic "natural" entities shared by all cultures but social constructs grounded in particular deep-rooted traditions — primarily those of Protestantism.[10] Liberal democracy worked well, first, because the original US federal framework, although a compromise between localism and centralism, still guaranteed some community self-determination, and, second, in the context of the old politics, because *de facto* WASP hegemony was a *fait accompli* to which all other groups simply assimilated or at least accepted as legitimate. Within the old politics, and in accordance with fundamental tenets of Protestantism, particularity was banished to the domain of the private (where the individual's relation to the divine cannot be mediated by either church or state). These private proclivities would not in principle disturb the public sphere other than as manifestations of harmless oddities, premodern residues or, at worst, social pathologies. Authenticity itself was a private affair. There could be no real "other" since everyone was "other" to God or its secularized otherness, the State. In the best Kantian liberal tradition, "authentic" Being (comprising entities such as "God, immortality and the soul") was not only unknowable and therefore purely a matter of faith but entirely beyond the power of "the understanding" and contraposed to a scientific mundanity predicated on apodictic principles such as space and time. The social and scientific dimensions were always *public* in the sense that they were mechanically constructed by applying universally valid *a priori* principles to whatever empirical content was given. The politics of authenticity challenges this alleged universalistic tradition as merely another particularistic ideology — a secularized version of Protestantism — but in so doing renders the old Kantian liberal consensus impossible to uphold. Habermasian efforts to recycle Kantianism via communication theory (whereby the new universal apodictic

9. For a fuller account, see Paul Piccone, "The Crisis of Liberalism and the Emergence of Federal Populism," in *Telos* 89 (Fall 1991), pp. 7-44.

10. These particular social constructs have come to be accepted as "natural" by Left-liberal ideology as a result of the unacknowledged acceptance of various versions of economic determinism and historical materialism (e.g., modernization theory), according to which there is a "natural" economic-technological development culminating in advanced capitalism, of which liberal democracy is its equally "natural" superstructural epiphenomenon. This logic legitimates liberal democracy as a universally valid system which all societies, sooner or later, will have to adopt, depending on their level of development. This is why liberal democracy from Woodrow Wilson on has tended to be as eschatological in seeking to impose global democracy worldwide as its former Marxist competitor was in spreading communism. At any rate, discredited as vulgar Marxism, these 19th century economistic and mechanistic views now thrive unacknowledged as part of the predominant liberal democratic ideology shared by both the Left and the Right.

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principles are now provided by linguistics) fail as well in a postmodern world polluted by a multiplicity of irreconcilable discourses of "authenticity."

The politics of authenticity addresses deeply-rooted human needs for community, wholeness and organicity which have gone unmet since at least the decline of the *ancièn regime* and the end of feudalism. Its resurrection within the nation-state and liberal democracy is fraught with irresolvable contradictions, especially in modern heterogeneous societies where the social, political and economic upheavals of the past several centuries have thrown together the most different communities, with occasionally catastrophic consequences such as the Holocaust or its "new and improved" recent version, ethnic cleansing. But even independently of this insurmountable obstacle, the new politics of authenticity, at least in the form they take at the close of the 20th century, are inherently incoherent, reified, conformist and ultimately counterproductive. In uncritically hypostatizing fixed, authentic essences and occluding the dynamicity of traditions and *nomoi* presupposed by historically viable communities, they end up relegitimating precisely the liberal-democratic regime otherwise identified as one of the main causes of the disintegration of that authenticity and organicity they seek to reconstitute. Dogmatically formulated, the politics of authenticity rule out even traditional federal solutions seeking to provide maximum autonomy to accomodate constantly refunctioned cultural particularities. It is for this reason that the essence of authenticity — "true nature" and traditions — needs to be carefully reexamined to dispel mistaken assumptions which make it inflexible, dogmatic and thereby politically impractical. It is here that David Gross' *The Past in Ruins*[11] makes an invaluable contribution in posing the question of the compatibility of traditions and modernity.

The Structure of Authenticity

In recent debates concerning multiculturalism, "outing," nationalism, etc., opposing positions have atrophied so fast that it is no longer immediately obvious what exactly constitutes that "authenticity" which is to be rescued from the dungeon of the private and brought out to flourish in a postmodern political arena. Both supporters and opponents tend to regard the content of authenticity as something like certificates of deposit, redeemable whenever needed. In other words, cultural identities, traditions and even sexual preferences are assumed to be fixed once and for all, ready to be used like furniture or clothing. In this account, the temporal dimension of culture is obliterated, thus ruling out precisely the transcendence the advocates of the politics of authenticity pretend to encourage. This politics of authenticity cannot envision the Zulu as a South African citizen with a Zulu background, as well as many other similar distinguishing particularities, a gay gradually choosing to become bisexual, or a Croat becoming a European who happens to live in Croatia. A

11. David Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity* (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachussetts Press, 1992).

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Zulu is always a Zulu, a gay is always a gay, a Croat always a Croat.

That identities are dynamic and the subjects to whom they are ascribed thrive in an ever changing present where they must constantly reinterpret the past in order to prefigure a different future is readily occluded by an identity logic legitimating only that part of social reality which can be forced to conform to the abstract concept. This reification of individuals and groups is primarily the result of that Enlightenment thinking best exemplified by the bureaucratic apparatus whose formal *modus operandi* is threatened by any uncontrolled "becoming" redefining the domain it is entrusted with administering. It is "natural," therefore, for bureaucracies — especially multicultural ones — constantly in need of justifying their own existence in terms of the permanence of the pathology they are allegedly meant to eliminate[12] to reify individuals and groups as passive clients with fixed identities. Minorities, the poor, the sick, the illiterate, the ethnics, the marginals and all those for whom the transcendence of their ascribed victimological status is a major life objective are further victimized by an identity logic which only a few years ago the now "multicultural" Left unambiguously criticized as "reification." Notwithstanding inflated claims to the contrary, Marxism never really made any inroads within the proletariat because "really existing proletarians," far from wanting their status generalized in some mythological classless society, usually are more interested in transcending a predicament they would rather regard as contingent and therefore potentially temporary. Within the new politics of authenticity the all-important Blochian dimension of "what in not yet, but ought to be" is collapsed in the what is, once and for all.

The fraudulent character of the politics of authenticity is not just the result of the occlusion of temporality and, *ipso facto*, of the inherent instability of identities, but also of the indeterminate nature of the latter. For what is cultural identity other than a cluster of often contradictory internalized traditions lived as a constantly shifting horizon? A gay person or a woman or a Latino is never exclusively a gay, a woman or a Latino, but a multi-dimensional individual with a complex history and, first and foremost, a free will open to transcendence. Biology is destiny only in the sense that sooner or later everyone dies: everything else is up for grabs. Identity is inherently evanescent because it is a function of how and why we constantly select and re-enact some of the internalized traditions and practices constituting the self not as it *is* (or it is assumed to be), but as it should be. In this sense also, the new politics of authenticity are but a recycled version of the politics of reification. And reification means, first and foremost, the forgetting of the past, the repression of traditions, and the elimination of temporality. Its acceptance within identity politics is due to the regression to an

12. This is the logic of the zoo-keeper that Alvin W. Gouldner attacked years ago in his critique of sociology. See his *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociological Theory Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). According to Gouldner, the sociologist's zeal for solving social problems is tempered by the fact that his very social function depends on the permanence of these very same social problems. Consequently, sociology ends up *perpetuating* and *managing*, rather than actually *solving* social problems.

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Enlightenment theory of progress whereby a desirable future-oriented modernity[13] is uncritically contraposed to a reactionary traditionalism stuck in an allegedly despicable past which, of course, no one would ever want to bring back.

The question of tradition, however, has nothing to do with restoring a long gone past — something which, at any rate, is both intelligible and absurd only within the framework of a unilinear theory of progress. Rather, it has to do with the constitution of the present. In this sense the title of Gross' book already announces a paradigmatically modernist account: it implicitly problematizes an otherwise *normal* state of affairs. Being "in ruins," the past must be in an abnormal predicament, in contraposition to a presumably normal "being whole." But what would a "whole" past be? Can the past, *qua* past, be in any state other than "in ruins"? The present can only posit itself as a reconstitution of a past which, were it not in ruins, would itself still be present. Only by assuming a self-sufficient modernity — an eternally "whole" present, presumably vibrant and dynamic because of the institutionalization of the fail-safe self-corrective mechanism of immanent "critique," long since discredited as circular — is it possible to conceive of the past as something in ruins, belonging to the dustbin of history. Gross seems so confident of the self-sufficiency of modernity, irrational as it may be, that he justifies dealing with traditions as a means to shock the present out of its complacent "normality" which, in the tradition of Critical Theory, is really "the untrue." As such, he is fully in agreement with Adorno, aware of the importance of traditions but simultaneously blinded by modernity into assuming their permanent erosion (or their only possible perpetuation as anti-tradition). However, as Luke indicates on the basis of the evidence Gross himself provides,[14] modernity is predicated on and permeated throughout by traditions to the point that its crisis can be seen as a result of modernity's unintended erasure of too much of its traditional base. The theory of artificial negativity was predicated precisely on the need for otherness by a modernity which, without it, loses its essential internal control mechanisms guaranteeing its viability.[15]

Critical Theory and Traditions

The problem is that the Left has never been able to handle traditions. Even its most sophisticated exponents, such as Adorno, who saw the eclipse of traditions

13. This dynamic character, however, is illusory. Already in *The German Ideology* Marx pointed out how, for the bourgeoisie — agents of modernity *par excellence* — history only unfolds in the past. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part One, ed. with an introduction by C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970), pp. 57ff. After the bourgeois revolutions (or, in more fashionable lingo, the advent of modernity) all there can be, presumably, is an eternal present. When all is said and done, modernity's constant appeal to "critique" is ultimately a subtle denial of the possibility of a *qualitatively* different future.

14. See Tim Luke, "Neo-Populism: Fabricating the Future by Rehabbing the Past" in this issue of *Telos*.

15. See Paul Piccone, "The Crisis of One-Dimensionality"; and Tim Luke, "Culture and Politics in the Age of Artificial Negativity"; both in *Telos* 35 (Spring 1978), pp. 43-72.

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as an indicator of social regression, could not entertain the possibility of either a refunctioning or a reinvention of traditions as the foundation of new communities. This inability to deal with traditions is a direct result of Adorno's negative Marxism — a surprisingly crude metaphysics buried in his writings under thick layers of Hegelianism, Kantianism and wide-ranging aesthetic references which render his otherwise luxurious ("Hotel Abyss") despair palatable to Western intellectuals still entertaining illusions about "realizing philosophy." It is no accident that, in the perennial Sisyphean search for "new and improved" versions of Marxist philosophy to embellish and recycle the old 19th century myth of the class struggle, incorrigibly wannabe *engagée* academics such as Jameson find in Adorno a suitable paradigm.[16] In a world already judged to have been overwhelmed by the ubiquity of market relations and agonizing "under the domination of commodification," for Adorno traditions can only partake in the general decadence and play, at best, a conformist role. Although he explicitly warns about the erosion of traditions as the beginning of barbarism,[17] his negative Marxism prevents him from seriously entertaining the possibility of a positive role for traditions within an emancipatory political project and leads him to systematically misread not only American social realities (understandable, since he hated the US and never made any real effort to come to terms with it) but also German ones. From a viewpoint which has deduced *a priori*, without bothering to provide any hard evidence to support its claims, that capitalism by and large has already carried out its universal homogenization, he bemoans "the absence of traditional aspects of culture in the US and of those experiences linked with them" and that Germany is in the midst of a terminal "crisis of historical consciousness." Confusing Hollywood's 1950s *papier mâché* versions of American society for the real thing,[18] and apparently forgetting the

16. Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990). For critical analyses of this work, see Eva Geulen, "A Matter of Tradition," and Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Suggested Reading: Jameson on Adorno," both in *Telos* 89 (Fall 1991), pp. 155-177. Cf. also Peter Osborne, "A Marxism for the Postmodern? Jameson's Adorno," in *New German Critique* 56 (Summer 1992), pp. 171-192.

17. See his "On Tradition," in this issue of *Telos*, p. 78.

18. However artificial and mediatized by opportunistic bureaucratic interests, the multiculturalism that exploded in the US after the early 1970s would never have been possible had there not been a powerful undercurrent of unhomogenized traditional residues that could be effectively instrumentalized to construct ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, etc. particularities into new bureaucratic fiefdoms for "minority" New Class operators. Limited mostly to the manicured, homogenized middle-class enclaves of Morningside Heights and Santa Monica, Adorno's American experience only reinforced his stereotypes of the US as what the culture industry marketed in the 1940s and 1950s as "the American way of life." Had he spent a little more time studying Brooklyn's and Chicago's ethnic neighborhoods or the Mid-West rather than inventing politically-correct "F-scales" and complaining about jazz, he may have come up with a different vision of the US than one finds in, e.g., *Minima Moralia* or *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. At any rate, today his facile claim that in the US traditions are "valued only as curiosity" needs considerable revision.

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extent to which Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was the result of a Cold War predicament practically imposed by the US in order to reconstruct and uphold that country as a bulwark against the former Soviet empire,[19] he fails to realize the resiliance of internalized traditional frameworks which, as has become clear after the collapse of the USSR and its satellites in Eastern Europe, could not be eradicated even under the most repressive conditions of communist dictatorship.

Clearly, Adorno's analysis of tradition is poisoned from the start by the famous opening aphorism in *Negative Dialectics*: "the whole is the untrue." Accordingly, "the whole remains as unreasonable, fateful and threatening as it was always" because of "the control of the few over the means of production, and the relentless conflicts this generates." It is the old fairy tale about the class struggle in the totally administered society, where all potentially oppositional elements are instrumentalized by the logic of domination to further integrate a fundamentally pathological society. Adorno rightly derides the positivist rejection of traditions as an abstract negation which leaves them operating unacknowledged within an equally unexamined logic of the given. Traditional meanings sedimented in language, mentalities and institutions continue mediating relations to the given and thus perpetuate themselves unchanged even more effectively than in a context explicitly predicated on traditional practices. Furthermore, as Adorno emphasizes, the concomitant relegation of traditions to a long gone irrational past presupposes a self-contained rational present which traditions now implicitly legitimate by lingering as seemingly unwarranted prohibitions. Here the paradox for Adorno is that, although a society without traditions is well on the way to barbarism, today traditions are no longer "present and none can be conjured." The possibility that traditions thrive by being reconstituted in the present in terms of changed social conditions — what historically happens to all living traditions which thereby retain their vitality and relevance — is ruled out on the basis of his other questionable assumption concerning the eclipse of subjectivity. Obviously, if there are no subjects any more it is impossible to revitalize anything, least of all traditions, which consequently persevere within modernity as mere relics.

Typically, Adorno tried to thread his way out of this theoretical *cul de sac*, where all "rational" discourse has been terminally contaminated by the predominant logic of domination, by deploying art as epistemology and substituting the artist for the knowing subject (only later, with the drafting of parts of *Negative Dialectics*, is philosophy explicitly acknowledged as an adequate cognitive discipline). This

19. Surprisingly, for someone as familiar with German culture as he was, Adorno readily generalizes the historically-specific "forgetting" of its Nazi past into an irreversible metaphysical predicament: "the breakdown of temporal continuity." The post-1989 resurgence of the extreme Right within an increasingly disenfranchised youth, a new self-consciousness among the few thousand Jews remaining in the country and the widespread longing for a broader continental identity in the wake of European unification testify to a revival of an heterogeneous historical consciousness never actually eradicated but only temporarily repressed, still largely torn by unresolved prewar conflicts.

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explains the puzzling methodology of some of Adorno's essays, including "On Tradition," where art is used as the *explenans* for a pathological social reality that today allegedly legitimates itself through the predominant modes of communication. It is problematic, since the insight that art is to provide has already been independently reached, and it is elitist, since it seeks to restrict access to Being only to "true" artists who can apprehend it directly and communicate it through their artistic efforts.[20] This happens "naturally" in a prereflexive dimension. Consequently, within such a pathological framework, the conscious articulation of traditions leads to their breakdown and falsification. Adorno's advice is to keep a distance from traditions, which must remain subterranean in order to remain viable. This assumption that the conscious articulation and reconstitution of tradition necessarily entails its falsification is merely a deduction from Adorno's other mistaken claims that the totality is false, the subject no longer exists and an all-powerful culture industry lubricates the wheels of a well-functioning, totally administered society. Clearly, within such a context, traditions can thrive only if they remain inaccessible to instrumental rationality. Adorno's strategy of hibernation — even for traditions — also entails the burial of that teleology embodied in these traditions in a generally inaccessible ontological dimension whose contradictory character can only be intuited by those few lucky ones, the artists, who are still free to communicate these intuitions through their art, outside the reach of the predominant logic of domination and interpretation. This is why "progressive aesthetic consciousness converged with the naive artist, whose non-conceptual intuition never had any pretensions to meaning. Perhaps this is why it succeeded from time to time."

Lacking a subject and thus unable to reconstitute traditions as normal living practices, Adorno could only judge their concrete manifestations negatively as frozen relics, tools of social integration in the predominant pathological social framework or as hidden modes of being which, as such, function only as irrational limits. What Adorno lacks is the equivalent of the Marxist category of "praxis" (originally an idealist category) which need not be the kind of hyperrational eschatological drama of particularizing the universal through the mediation of the "party," but simply the conscious activity of living human beings negotiating everyday life the best way they can. Within such a framework, alienation is always necessarily partial and there is always a modicum of freedom.

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20. Having dismissed the *Lebenswelt* as a dimension of Being where the dialectic of mediation and immediacy unfolds, Adorno substituted for it the fuzzy category of "mimesis" which, as a representational moment, reduces social theory and philosophy to aesthetics (and helps explain why Adorno's social theory is found primarily in his incomplete — and impossible to complete — *Aesthetic Theory*). Notwithstanding his standard Marxist critique of Husserl and idealism for "blindness to production" and for taking "the product as a given" (since "fetishization of the current existing . . . extends . . . over the total social consciousness"), which systematically misunderstands the thrust of Husserl's account of "constitution," Adorno never went beyond pointing out ways to apprehend, unfortunately often falsely, aspects of the "false totality." See his *Against Epistemology*, trans. by Willis Domingo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), pp. 139-143.

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At any rate, Adorno's failure to come to terms with traditions is symptomatic of the subsequent generation of intellectuals who have altogether forgetten Adorno's emphasis on traditions as essential socializing and humanizing mechanisms and simply proceed to theorize an allegedly self-contained modernism whose very crisis becomes thereby unintelligible. Thus John Michael, having concluded that any discussion of traditions is inextricably grounded in reactionary efforts to restore idealized feudal realities by contemporary intellectuals longing to take on the role of High Priests and philosopher-kings, can question whether traditions and axiological heterogeneity are in principle compatible within a context of generalized modernity.[21] That this has been the distinctly American predicament before the advent of identity politics and multiculturalism, and that it was negotiated exceptionally well, notwithstanding notorious flaws such as the legacy of racism and other forms of inequality, is inexplicably forgotten. In fact it worked so well that whatever positive results there may have been in the wake of the social paroxysms of the last four decades are a direct result of that logic of traditional liberalism rather than of any insurrection or of the "new social movements." Both the Brown vs. Board of Education and the Roe vs. Wade decisions took place well before the rise of the civil rights and the feminist movements.

It is indicative of the Left's inability to confront traditions that in their analysis of these matters hardly any Left critics (with the exception of Adorno, who never underestimated its value) ever broach the subject of religion — what has historically been and remains the most formidable bastion of traditions. That may be due to the fact that, aside from whatever idolatrous mundane form it may take, religion deals with the ultimate relations concerning the part and the whole, the finite and the infinite, the individual and the totality. No matter how well one can deflect these questions in particular contexts, they call for implicit or explicit answers not as idle speculation, but as part and parcel of practical everyday life. Only ideal types of alienated "workers" or "cheerful robots" perform unreflectively. Real human beings are always inescapably immersed in transcendence. It has been the historical role of organized religions to provide pre-packaged solutions to these questions and, therefore, facilitate the achievement of an integrated organic consciousness to people who otherwise would have considerable difficulty in doing so. Pending the development of new forms of consciousness and being, this organic integration can only be carried out by means of traditions which, however, can take various pathological forms, depending on the particular historical context within which they are reconstituted. Jacoby is obviously right about the "desirability" of refunctioning *bona fide* pathological traditions such as anti-Semitism and the KKK.[22] But even in these cases one should separate the chaff from the wheat. Thus, the formation of the KKK was inextricably tied to the South's military defeat and to the need to

21. See John Michael, "Tradition and the Critical Talent," in this issue of *Telos*.
22. See Russell Jacoby, "Rotten Traditions," in this issue of *Telos*.

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defend whatever could be saved of Southern communities in the face of the ruthless Northern onslaught. Its racist connotations were contingent cultural particularities which only later became decisive.

Gramsci and those few other Marxists who understood the role of religion as something more substantial than "the opium of the people" and sought to substitute historical materialism for the predominant mythological otherworldly orientation always insisted on the former being able to deal with all the fundamental questions historically tackled by the latter.[23] More specifically, Marxism as secularized Christianity was to have refunctioned traditions after the bourgeoisie had carried out the industrial revolution. Cultural hegemony was to be achieved by conquering civil society and reconstituting its traditions within an historical materialist framework emphasizing the historicity of all cultural artifacts. That "given" to be historicized, however, the traditional patrimony, is essential for any project of social reconstruction. That today's intellectuals resist discussing traditions as the foundations of communities, insisting instead on "critique" as an alternative, is an indication of a cultural poverty which can never be translated into a qualitative alternative to the *status quo* but leads, instead, only to its rationalization and perpetuation.

If the end of the Cold War means not only the collapse of the bureaucratic centralism of "really existing" socialism but also the terminal crisis of liberal managerialism and its political otherness, the nation-state, then it may be time to start thinking about alternative modes of governance, reconstitutions of communities and new forms of individuality. Such utopian efforts are impossible without a much better understanding and appreciation of the role of traditions in constituting individuals and communities. To complacently assume that a modernity unencumbered by traditions will criticize itself to Nirvana is to become resigned to a perpetuation of the present social disintegration and widespread nihilism. The path to a better future may have to thread through forests of still blossoming traditions. Gross' book begins to indicate the direction the discussion should go, even if too often the questions he asks remain overburdened by modernist ideology.

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23. See Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, Valentino Gerratana ed., Vol. II (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1975), pp. 1295ff. It is doubtful, however, whether Gramsci's projected "modern" substitutes for traditional entities really work as effectively as what they claim to displace. His attempt to reconcile his fundamentally Crocean positions with the crudities of what at the time passed as Marxism could only lead to frustrations. To realize what an abyss separated Gramsci from run-of-the-mill Marxism, one need only re-read his devastating critique of Bukharin's philosophy — which prefigured the Diamat of the past three quarters of this century. Today, the kind of transcendence envisioned by Gramsci is possible only as the gradual internalization of new or reconstituted *nomoi* within whatever communitarian frameworks are available. It definitely cannot be imposed administratively by purely public agencies which cannot penetrate that all-important *lebensweltliche* dimension still constituted by relatively inaccessible traditional residues.

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Thatcherism, Czech-style: Transition to Capitalism in the Czech Republic

Peter Rutland

On November 11, 1992, thousands of coal-miners from northern Bohemia and Ostrava crowded into the Old Town Square in Prague to protest government plans to stop the mining of brown coal and to close unprofitable black coal pits.[1] The miners listened to a speech by Vladimir Dlouhy, Minister of Economics and a leader of the Civic Democratic Alliance (a libertarian party to the right of Vaclav Klaus' Civic Democratic Party). Dlouhy explained that the brown coal mines had to be closed on environmental grounds and promised further government help to create new jobs. The miners politely applauded and then dispersed for an hour's shopping in the new K Mart and other downtown Prague stores before returning to their buses for the trip home.

This encounter typifies labor relations in the post-socialist Czech Republic. The most radical transition from socialism to capitalism in Eastern Europe has been ushered in with minimal social discontent. Klaus is regarded as the architect of the most orthodox Thatcherite solution to the challenge of transition. Yet his neoliberal program owes considerably more to Czech political culture than his critics and supporters usually recognize. Despite a carefully cultivated public image of monetarist zeal, Klaus is much more a pragmatist than an ideologue. He uses the rhetoric of neoliberalism, while pursuing a more nuanced economic policy that preserves social harmony.

1. Employment in coal mines fell from 121,000 in 1989 to 92,000 in 1991. See *Mlada Fronta Dnes* (May 5, 1992). A further 11 pits in Ostrava with 9,500 workers are scheduled for closure. In 1993 the mines will receive K2.8 billion in subsidies (K=crowns).

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The following discussion is confined to the Czech Republic. The political culture and the impact of the economic reforms in Slovakia are sufficiently different to merit separate treatment. Yet, despite the breakup of the Czechoslovak federation, the two republics followed rather similar economic policies between 1990 and 1992. Both implemented liberalization and privatization although, because of the structural differences between their respective economies, Slovak unemployment rose more sharply than in the Czech lands. Despite these differences, the Slovak labor unions were only slightly more integrated into the political process than their Czech counterparts. The Slovaks pushing for separation were motivated more by questions of identity and pride than by worries about the economy. Czech politicians (such as Klaus) who pressed for a clean break were largely motivated by economic considerations.

Roots

Klaus' pragmatism is rooted in a commonsensical view that markets work better than central planning, that a stable currency is better than hyperinflation, and that the Czechs' future lies in rapid integration with Western Europe. These views, supported by Czech public opinion, have more to do with Czech history and traditions than with any off-the-shelf reform program imported from Bolivia via Poland. In fact, Klaus is scornful of $1000-a-day experts from the IMF and the World Bank, who provide, as he put it, "soft advice for hard currency."

While Klaus may have studied for half a year at the University of Chicago in the 1980s, before that he spent a dozen years working as a functionary in the State Bank. Banking, curious though it may seem, is a central element in Czech national identity. In the late 19th century, when Czechs were barred from political power, their bourgeoisie's efforts were channelled into commerce. This legacy lives on in the form of the majestic banks built in central Prague at that time, many of them decorated with the motifs of the Czech National Revival. Czechs also proudly remind visitors that their country was the only one in the region to avoid falling into hyperinflation after WWI. (In East European political discourse, WWI was only yesterday).

It is important to bear in mind the simple historical and geographic facts of life. The Czech lands comprise Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, whose inhabitants have distinct customs and dialects. Regional identities are strong even within Bohemia itself, but no place in the Czech lands is more than three hour's drive from Prague — thanks largely to

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the pre-WWII road system. (The few highways the communists built run to the East). Most of the 10 million Czechs live in medium-sized towns: Prague has a population of only 1.2 million (one third the size of Budapest). Families have lived in the same region for generations. This means that provincial social networks are very strong, surviving or even prospering under 40 years of communism.

The Czechs have lived for centuries surrounded by Germans and Austrians. Most villages and towns have been there for 500 years, as the buildings on their central squares testify. The country has 2,000 castles. The portraits staring down from their walls remind visitors that since 1620 all the lords have been Germans. Under communism medieval history was not studied. Indeed, the government tried to revive the heritage of the 15th century Hussites, portraying them as anti-German populists. These efforts, however, did not bolster the regime's legitimacy. On the contrary, a whole subculture emerged among Czech youth who spent weekends following heritage trails criss-crossing the countryside and linking historical monuments. Interestingly, in the 1970s and 1980s these hikers dressed themselves from head to toe in US Army surplus gear (or home-made versions thereof).

Thus for Czechs the slogan "back to Europe," which carried *Civic Forum* to electoral victory in 1990, was not a theoretical abstraction but a physical reality and a reflection of their historical experience at the heart of Europe.[2] Of course, the Czechs will never forgive the Germans for what happened during WWII, while envying their wealth and self-confidence. But thanks to the expulsion of two and a half million Sudeten Germans in 1945, for the first time in centuries the Germans no longer threaten the Czechs' territorial identity. As for the Russians, they have suddenly become irrelevant (culturally and politically, but not economically). Prior to 1945, Russian influence on Bohemia had been minimal.[3] Geographically, the Czechs have gone from being a neighbor of the USSR to being separated from Russia by a handful of independent countries. Yet the Czechs remain dependent on Russia for their oil and gas supplies, although work is scheduled to begin on the Ingolstadt pipeline linking Bohemia to the German oil distribution system.

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2 It is symptomatic that the main road from Prague to the airport, formerly Leninska, is now renamed Evropska. For a short time in early 1990 it was named Benesova, until it was decided that post-war President Eduard Benes had been too friendly to the Russians. Likewise, many Czechs spontaneously began displaying bumper stickers showing the European Community flag.

3. President Masaryk, however, encouraged ties to counter-balance Germany.

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Given that the Czechs were ruled by foreigners since the 17th century, their apparent resignation in the face of foreign conquest (in 1938, 1948, 1968) led many commentators to portray Czech nationalism as weak and fragile. In fact, it is alive and well, and its self-effacing nature testifies to its inner self-confidence. This nationalism has been overlooked by Western authors, who have typically concentrated on the country's strong democratic traditions. While this legacy is important, and distinguishes the Czechs from most of their East European neighbors, it did not exist in a vacuum. Czech civil society blossomed during the 19th century within a revived sense of nationhood. Anglo-American liberals are reluctant to concede that nationalism and democracy are two sides of the same coin: that democracy presupposes the definition and symbolic invocation of the demos.

It is thus inaccurate to take Hasek's *Good Soldier Schweik* as typifying Czech national character. Schweik's sly skepticism and feigned ignorance is only part of the story. There was also the huge network of sports clubs (Sokol) which culminated in the mass gymnastic displays of the Spartakiade in the 1920s (subsequently emulated in Germany and Russia). These cultural factors also affected the impact of communism on Czech society. Alone among the East Europeans, Czechoslovakia opted for socialism in a more-or-less peaceful manner (the communists won a plurality with 38% of the votes in the semi-free elections of 1946), and the regime continued to enjoy solid working class support into the 1980s. The suppression of the 1968 Prague Spring led to the "normalization" which kept the centralized socialist system intact just as the country's neighbors were opening their economies to the West searching for market socialism. These reform efforts failed, and left a legacy of social turmoil and foreign debts. Paradoxically, the Czechs were in better shape to undertake the transition to a market economy in 1989 precisely because they had not significantly deviated from the Stalinist model in the 1970s and 1980s.

Such historical and geographic considerations tend to be drowned out by all the chatter about transition programs, policy sequencing and privatization models. The upshot of this capsule description of Czech culture is that the Czechs know who they are, where they belong and most of them seem to know each other. Personal networks, often regionally based, have been as important as political ideology in welding together the new post-socialist political and economic elite. Many if not most of this new elite have come from the lower ranks of the old elite. (From where else could they come? It is impossible to staff the entire government and managerial class from emigres and dissidents).

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It is difficult to explain why Vaclav Klaus was able to distinguish himself from the other, more well-known Civic Forum leaders and appropriate the "road to Europe" and to capitalism as his own. Accident plays a large part: Klaus was not a political genius, just the right man, in the right place, at the right time. He does have a certain charisma (it should be remembered that when Max Weber used this term, he had in mind not the personal qualities of the leader but the public's willingness to project their hopes and fears on whichever suitable-looking leader happened to be available). Paradoxically, Klaus' relative obscurity might have worked in his favor. More well-known dissidents, such as Petr Pithart and Jiri Dienstbier, were associated with the tribulations of the past, while Klaus was a new face who talked only of the future. Respect for the dissidents' suffering under the normalization regime was counter-balanced by lingering doubts about the viability of the reform communist model they sought to implement in 1968. Although the liberals and social democrats in *Civic Forum* also favored market reform and integration with Europe, the public was very alert to signs that their commitment was weaker than that of right-wing leaders. For example, Foreign Minister Dienstbier clearly preferred to stay out of Nato and devoted considerable effort to trying to persuade the US to launch a rescue package for Russia, buying the needed food and consumer goods in East Europe. This smacked too much of a search for a "third way" in foreign affairs, for which there was apparently little public sympathy.

The Political Consolidation of the Market Reformers

The new Civic Forum government which emerged in the wake of the November 1989 "velvet revolution" was united on the need to break the communist monopoly of political power. The old regime was dismantled within a matter of weeks and power was handed over to a new group of leaders, mostly 1968-vintage dissidents. The new leaders in *Civic Forum*, however, were sharply divided over the wisdom of a rapid move towards a market economy. Deputy Prime Minister Walter Komarek warned that "if a market economy were immediately introduced, economic agony and chaos would result."[4] On the contrary, Finance Minister Klaus argued that the move towards the market was inevitable, and it was delay in introducing reform which threatened catastrophe. Although Komarek was in favor of a market economy in principle, Klaus suggested that unless drastic steps were taken, such as

4. *Lidova democracie* (July 2, 1990).

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cuts in subsidies, price liberalization and mass privatization, the momentum of reform would be lost and the political consensus for change would never be regained. (Ironically, Klaus had sat out the normalization period as a researcher in Komarek's Institute of Forecasting). Klaus persuaded the government that plans for economic reform had to be drawn up as soon as possible — even before the first free parliamentary elections, scheduled for June 1990. Komarek lost and was removed from office. An outline of the reform package was agreed on May 15 1990 — just in time for the first free parliamentary elections.

In the June 1990 elections the Civic Forum alliance won 49.5% of the vote in the Czech lands and, together with its Slovak sister organization, Public Against Violence, won 170 of the 300 seats in the federal parliament. This gave the new government a firm mandate for change. The situation was not so rosy in the provinces, however, where there were complaints that the communists were using their power to block economic reform or turn it to their own personal advantage. President Havel had warned against a witchhunt of communists, but in response to complaints from Civic Forum branches in Moravia he shifted his position and in a speech on August 19 came down firmly in favor of a "second revolution" to bring about a market economy. Following fierce debate, on September 17, 1990 parliament adopted a "Scenario on Economic Reform." It proposed the removal of price controls, the establishment of currency convertibility by January 1991, and the privatization of small and large-scale industry. A broad Transformation Act laying out plans to change the ownership structure of large-scale state industry was passed November 1.

In local elections in November 1990, Civic Forum held on with 35% of the vote, although the Communist Party polled a surprising 17%, drawing support mainly from pensioners and agricultural workers.[5] The public were unsure as to the wisdom of rapid reform. A November 1990 poll showed that 43% of the public were in favor of the economic reform program, 23% had no opinion, 10% expressed concern, and 23% voiced opposition.[6] 41% of Czechs and 61% of Slovaks expressed a willingness to strike if price increases were excessive.

Civic Forum itself remained deeply divided over the pace of economic reform. While many social democrats in Civic Forum's national leadership adhered to the Komarek line, most of its provincial organizations

5. *Respektr* (November 14, 1990).

6. Poll of the Association for Independent Social Analysis, cited in *Mlada Fronta Dnes* (December 6, 1990).

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swung behind Klaus and on October 13 1990 elected him Chairman of Civic Forum.[7] A Civic Forum conference in Olomouc on December 8-9, reaffirmed the commitment to rapid marketization and stated that there was no "third way" between capitalism and Soviet-style socialism.[8] Rival groups formed Left and Right clubs, and on January 13 its General Council voted to turn Civic Forum into a political party committed to democracy and capitalism.[9] On February 23 the organization split into the Civic Democratic Party led by Klaus and the smaller liberal Civic Movement led by Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier. From then on Klaus was able to persuade the government to pursue his reform strategy.

Despite the ambivalence about reform revealed in opinion polls, popular opposition to reform was much weaker than in Poland or Hungary and pro-market leaders were more determined. Klaus, however, stressed that he would proceed carefully and try to learn from the errors of Czechoslovakia's neighbors. Klaus saw no need for Poland's overzealous "shock therapy" and wanted to avoid the wave of "spontaneous privatizations" in Hungary (which resulted in the selling of valuable assets to foreigners and former communist officials at bargain prices).

Budgetary Stabilization and Price Liberalization.

Confronted with an inflation rate of of 50% per month, at the beginning of 1990 Poland and Yugoslavia administered radical "shock therapy," choking off the money supply and plunging into full currency convertibility. Czechoslovakia was in a better position, since it did not have a heavy foreign debt and the authorities had kept the money supply under control.[10] In 1990 retail prices rose a modest 14%, while wages rose 3%.[11] However, as in all socialist economies, the Czechs inherited a distorted price structure and a money overhang of K300 billion in consumer savings — K18,000 per capita, the equivalent to 17 months' average income.

On March 28 Klaus persuaded parliament to adopt an austere budget

7. According to a poll carried out by the Institute for Public Opinion Research, 70% of Czechs thought Klaus' policies would be good for Civic Forum, and 42% approved of his selection as head of the organization (with only 21% opposed). In Slovakia, in contrast, only 10% were in favor and 32% opposed. *Hosrodarske novinyr* (November 22, 1990).

8. *Lidove noviny* (October 12, 1990).

9. *Lidove Noviny* (January 14, 1991); *Tvdenik* (January 17, 1991).

10. In 1989 its debt stood at $8 billion, or $500 per capita — compared to $1000 in Poland and $2000 in Hungary. Information whose source is not specifically noted comes from the CTK news agency daily bulletin, *Ecoservice*, or from Czech TV.

11. The average wage at the end of 1990 was K3,250.

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for 1990, with a projected deficit of only K5 billion. Klaus kept a tight grip on government spending and 1990 ended with a K5 billion surplus. The 1991 budget projected further cutbacks in spending, particularly in subsidies to industry and agriculture, which was 15% of total spending. In order to curtail these subsidies, prices had to be freed. On July 9, 1990 subsidies on a wide range of food produce were eliminated, leading to a 26% jump in prices. On January 1, 1991 price controls were abolished for 85% of retail products, which jumped 59% in 1991, but have only grown at 12-14% per year since. Czechs seem confident that inflation will be controlled and have not rushed to spend their savings. (Thus the money overhang has not been a significant problem).

Although subsidies to manufacturing industry were virtually eliminated, some sectors continued to receive subventions — primarily railways and farms. (The latter have been losing about K20 billion a year). Apart from budgetary subsidies, the government also had to tackle the problem of bad loans and mushrooming inter-enterprise debt (which at the beginning of 1991 stood at K70 billion). These bad debts were taken from commercial banks and placed into a Consolidation Bank, specially created in May 1991. This cleaned up the balance sheets of state owned enterprises (SOE) and the banks, enabling them to participate in the privatization process without being weighed down by old debt. Nevertheless, by the end of 1992 SOE debts had crept up to K300 billion. In general, banks are charging lenders real, positive interest rates. While there are glaring examples of government bail-outs of ailing enterprises through back-door refinancing, such steps seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

A series of devaluations in 1990 moved the crown steadily towards convertibility.[12] The crown was devalued to 28/$ in December 1990, and has stayed at that rate since. The crown is pegged to a basket of five Western currencies and is fully convertible for business purposes. Imports were discouraged by the imposition of a 20% tariff in February 1991. Klaus deliberately under-valued the crown in order to deter imports and make Czechoslovakia more attractive for foreign investors — hourly wages are 50% below those in Poland or Hungary, although labor productivity is higher.[13] This fiscal and monetary stabilization

12. In January 1990 a 20% devaluation took it to K16/$. On October 12 it was devalued by 55%, to K24/$, and by 17% on December 28, to K28/$. Separate business and tourist rates were abolished.

13. Purchasing power parity calculations suggest that the Czech crown is 60% undervalued compared to the Polish zloty and 160% compared to the Hungarian forint.

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came against a backdrop of steady economic decline. The crucial factor triggering the fall in GDP was the 40% drop in exports to the Soviet Union. The one bright spot was the strong growth in exports to the European Community, coming primarily from state firms. Indeed, so successful were they in shipping steel to Germany that the European Community imposed import quotas in November 1992.

Table 1
Czechoslovak Economic Performance[14]

% change on previous year:	1989	1990	1991	1992 (est)
GDP	1.4	-0.4	-15.9	-8
consumer prices	1.5	18.4	53.6	14
real industrial wage	0.9	-5.7	-26.7	3
as % of GDP:				
budget balance	-2.4	0.1	-2.0	-4
govt spending	64.5	60.1	52.9	53
unemployment	0	1.0	6.6	5
annual change in:				
exports to:				
market economies	8.4	7.9	31.2	2
ex CMEA	-18.2	-30.7	-49.5	-8
imports from:				
market economies	-3.3	9.3	7.7	3
ex CMEA	-4.2	-23.6	-41.8	-4

The Emergence of the Private Sector[15]

Unlike Poland and Hungary, Czechoslovakia had a minuscule private sector prior to 1989. However, since the revolution it has experienced explosive growth, rising to 8.3% of GNP in 1991. Restitution laws were passed in October 1990 and February 1991 (after fierce parliamentary confrontations), returning 100,000 property units to their former owners. 1948 was established as the cut-off date for restitution to avoid arguments over the legitimacy of the seizure of property belonging to the 2 million Sudeten Germans expelled from the country in 1945. Restitution really affects only housing and small businesses: by 1948 the non-communist Benes government had already nationalized 86% of industrial assets.

14. *Ecoservice* (November 13, 1992). 1992 figures are estimates based on first 9 months.
15. On this, see Peter Rutland, *Shaping the Future: International Assistance for Small Business Development in Czechoslovakia*, report prepared for the OECD (October 30, 1992).

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Separate laws were passed in 1991 covering the restitution of land. Transformation Councils were also set up in each state and collective farm to supervise the return of the land and the restructuring of farms into smaller cooperatives. However, 70% of state and cooperative farms are operating at a loss, and, given the glut of agricultural products, there is little enthusiasm among farmers to establish independent private farms. (So far only 4,000 have done so). Thus farming has been left largely unchanged by the privatization campaign and continues to rely on state subsidies (as in most other European countries).

On October 25 1990, a law on "small privatization" was passed mandating the sale of shops, cafes and workshops through public auction (units were not sold outright, but were leased for three, and later five, years.) The first auctions took place on January 26, 1991 and by January 1993, 22,004 units had been sold of the 32,000 designated, raising K29 billion[16] (8,820 were sold in Slovakia, raising K12 billion). Restitution and privatization auctions have allowed new private entrepreneurs to gain access to premises at low cost and at least 45% of retailing is now in private hands.[17] A series of laws approved in April 1990 abolished previous legal restrictions on private economic activity. The private sector expanded from 75,000 people at the end of 1989 to 294,000 a year later. By May 1992 there were 1,123,582 registered entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic and 360,442 in Slovakia (although 70% of them continued to hold full-time jobs in the state sector).[18] These figures mean that no less than 9% of the adult population in the Czech Republic and 4% in Slovakia were registered as entrepreneurs.[19] In addition, the 4,614 private firms in operation by September 1991 employed an additional 32,858 workers.[20]

Full-time employment in the private and cooperative sectors rose from 1.3 million in 1990 to 2 million in 1991 — 29% of the country's 7.2 million workforce. Of this, 16.4% were in the private sector and 12.0% in cooperatives.[21] According to official estimates the private sector in Czechoslovakia generated K79 billion or 8.1% of GDP in 1991,

16. *Ecoservice* (January 6, 1993). Most of the money has gone into the Fund of National Property, where it is frozen for seven years and thus cannot be used to cover current budget deficits.
17. *Ecoservice* (July 23, 1992).
18. *Lidove noviny* (August 10, 1992); *Ecoservice* (August 4, 1992).
19. *Ecoservice* (June 19, 1992).
20. *Podniky a nezemedelska druzstva s malym poctem pracovniku*, Federal Statistical Office (December 1991). This data only covers firms with less than 100 employees.
21. *Ecoservice* (June 10, 1992).

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up from 4.1% in 1989 and 5.3% in 1990.[22] This is concentrated in retailing, services and construction. As of May 1992, however, state enterprises still accounted for 90.8% of industrial output.[23]

A massive survey of entrepreneurs in 1992 found that they came from a broad cross-section of society: 46% were skilled workers without secondary education, 34% high school graduates and only 14% were university graduates.[24] 32% reported having an entrepreneur in their family at some point in the past. Fear of unemployment was cited as the major factor leading individuals to start a business. This explosion of entrepreneurial activity testifies to the pro-market orientation of many Czechs. It also suggests that they have internalized market values. They seem prepared to take individual responsibility for dealing with economic change and will thus be less inclined to take collective action to ease the costs of transition. A Sociology Institute survey carried out in July 1992 found that Czech society can be divided into two broad groups: the "paternalist" type (43% of all adults), who still look to the state as the main guarantor of their standard of living, and the "liberal" type (57%) who are prepared to wager on the market.[25]

At present, however, the booming private sector is more important as a sociological than an economic phenomenon. These entrepreneurs mostly run single-family operations and have done little to reverse the downward slide in GDP since 1989. Nevertheless, this shows that many Czechs are taking individual responsibility for their economic well-being, rather than turning to collective action to halt the erosion of their living standards. Most of the political influence of the new private sector has been channelled through Klaus' own political party. While there is an Entrepreneurs' Association and even an Entrepreneurs' Party, these entrepreneurs prefer to focus on their personal prosperity and show only a limited interest in political activism.

The Privatization of Large-Scale Industry

A series of laws passed in April 1990 laid the legal foundation for converting SOEs into joint-stock companies. In the first six months of 1990 the 100 large trusts which dominated the economy of the Czech

22. *Ecoservice* (April 3, 1992).

23. Joint ventures accounted for 3.2%, cooperatives 1.5% and private entrepreneurs only 3%.

24. *Entrepreneur-92*, a survey of 5,726 entrepreneurs carried out in January-February 1992 by the Public Opinion Institute, part of the Federal Statistical Institute.

25. M. Kudernatsch, "Jaky bude kapitalismus v Cechach?" in *Ekonom*, No. 52, (December 25,1992), pp. 26-9.

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Republic were broken into 330 independent enterprises. The vast majority of communist-appointed top directors were dismissed and replaced by their more technically qualified deputies. In July 1990 the State Planning Commission was abolished and SOEs no longer had to meet production targets. A Bankruptcy Law was introduced in October 1991, but not a single sizeable SOE has been liquidated and the right of creditors to force closure only came into effect in April 1993. On February 26, 1991 a law was passed committing the government to the privatization of the bulk of Czechoslovakia's 4,500 state enterprises; in June the government published regulations governing the large scale privatization program.[26] The goal was to bring about a mass privatization of state industry as quickly as possible.

Klaus recognized that radical measures had to be adopted to make significant inroads into the gargantuan state sector before the economy collapsed. His strategy for mass privatization consisted of two elements. First, to speed up the process he made managers responsible for drafting their own firms' privatization plans. This differs from the more centralized procedure initially projected in Poland, where special teams in each ministry were to prepare plans for firms in their sector. It also differs from the second Polish approach (now emulated by the Hungarians), where privatization is contracted out to teams of outside consultants. To date, neither in Poland nor in Hungary have significant numbers of state enterprises been privatized. Second, Klaus was prepared to gamble on a leap into popular capitalism. He realized that if state assets were to be divested they would have to be distributed free of charge, given the lack of domestic capital and the paucity of foreign buyers. For reasons of equity and efficiency it was thought that shares should be given to citizens at large, not to managers or workers of individual plants. Dusan Triska, one of Klaus' advisers, devised the coupon method as the vehicle for mass privatization. Each resident adult citizen was entitled to buy a book of coupons for K1000 ($35), and use them to bid for shares in companies put up for privatization.

Political considerations were also crucial in the adoption of the coupon method. New parliamentary elections had been set for June 1992, but party identification among Czech citizens was still very weak. Aware of Thatcher's experience in the Ox, Klaus realized that the coupon method could create a constituency of 2-4 million voters with a vested

26. R. Frydman, A. Rapaczynski, J. S. Earle, *The Privatization Process in Central Europe* (London: Central European University Press, 1993), pp. 70-92.

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interest in the success of the privatization program — and of his party, which was the main guarantor of its success. As Finance Minister, Klaus saw to it that his own signature appeared on every coupon book.

This approach was a novelty. It had been used only once before, to sell the telephone company in British Columbia. It had never been used to privatize a large number of enterprises simultaneously. No one had any clear idea about how the coupon method would work — if it would work at all. In response to criticisms that the scheme would create an excessive dispersal of ownership and prevent effective control, the government allowed individuals or firms to set up Investment Privatization Funds (IPFs) entitled to bid for citizens' coupons. Each firm had to draw its own privatization project and submit it for approval, first to its current owner (usually the Ministry of Industry) and then to the Ministry of Privatization in its republic. Firms could propose direct sale to a domestic or foreign buyer; sale through auction or tender; or conversion into a joint stock company, with or without participation in the coupon scheme. Any group of citizens or a foreign company had the right to submit a particular proposal for privatizing a given firm. In the first wave, the average Czech firm had 3.8 projects submitted — but only a small number of rival projects were eventually selected. 1,491 firms were chosen to take part in the first wave and had to submit their projects by October 31, 1991. Their assets had a book value of K299 billion ($9.5 billion) — about 25% of Czechoslovak industry. This meant each K1,000 coupon was backed by about K35,000 of assets.

For several weeks in January 1992 the 100 members of the Czech Ministry of Privatization closeted themselves in the Lnare Castle in southern Bohemia and sifted through thousands of projects. They were helped by the Multinational Strategies Group — a team of 20 American advisors (mostly ex-Wall Street bankers), paid for by the US Agency for International Development. Once a project was approved, the equity passed from the former owner to the Fund of National Property, which will reduce its holdings within three years through the coupon method or through sale of shares.

When the coupons went on sale in October 1991, the public showed little interest in buying them. The government expected 2-4 million of the 11.5 million eligible citizens to buy coupons, but only half a million were sold in the first three months. The scheme was too complicated for the average citizen to understand and the government TV advertising campaign, featuring young men and women leaping out of BMWs and waving their coupon books, did not succeed in explaining what the scheme was all about. The latter changed dramatically in January, with

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aggressive advertising by some of the IPFs, most notably Harvard Capital and Consulting. HC&C was founded by Viktor Kozeny, a 27 year old Harvard graduate. It ran TV ads promising a cash payment of K10,350 in one year's time to anyone who invested their K1,000 coupon with HC&C — a guaranteed 1,000 percent return on their investment. HC&C also employed 22,000 agents to work the lines at registration points, persuading people to sign over their coupons. Many of the other 437 IPFs followed suit, with some promising a K15,000 return.

The antics of the investment funds generated huge political controversy and provided Klaus' critics with considerable ammunition. Yet the funds' appeal to greed paid off and saved the program. People realized that there was a chance to make real money through the coupons. As the January 31, 1992 deadline approached, lines began to form outside post offices, with people waiting six hours in heavy snow to register their coupons. The government ran out of coupon books (8 million of which had been printed in Germany) and had to postpone the deadline. By February 29, 8,565,642 coupons had been sold, 5,977,466 in the Czech republic and 2,588,176 in Slovakia. 72% of the coupons were subsequently registered with IPFs. The six largest funds (including HC&C) controlled about 20% of the total.

After several further delays the first wave of coupon bidding began on May 18, 1992 (just three weeks before the June 5 elections) which Klaus won.[27] It consisted of four successive rounds, in which the prices of shares (in coupons) were adjusted to balance supply and demand. If demand exceeded supply by more than 25%, the shares of that firm were withdrawn and entered into the next round at a higher price (in coupon points). The firms most popular with coupon bidders were banks, hotels, trading companies, and those with foreign partners. In some cases the coupon price of shares in such firms was increased by more than 2,000% in subsequent waves of bidding, while the price of unpopular shares, such as utility companies, were heavily discounted.

By January 1993, after five rounds of computerized bidding, 93% of the 299 million shares offered had been sold and 99% of the coupons had been "spent."[28] All told, 1,320 firms had been privatized by one of the various methods, with K343 billion of assets, of which 65% had been sold for coupons. Foreign buyers bought into 70 firms, with a mere

27. J. Pehe, "Czechoslovakia's Political Balance Sheet, 1990-92," in *RFE/RL Research Report* (June 19, 1992), pp. 24-31.

28. J. Burger and M. Mejstrik, "First Wave of Vouchers Ends Successfully," in *Privatization Newsletter of Czechoslovakia*, No. 11 (December 1992), pp. 1-5.

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3% of total assets (worth K10 billion). Thus claims that mass privatization would facilitate "cherry picking" by foreign investors turned out to be unfounded. A second privatization wave, involving another 500 firms, will begin in the Czech Republic in late 1993.

Initial fears that the coupon method would lead to an excessive dispersal of share ownership have proven ungrounded, thanks to the concentration of coupons in the IPFs. No single fund can hold more than 20% of the shares of a given firm, but holdings of say 10% should guarantee the fund a seat on the firm's board of directors. Taken together, the funds will probably have a controlling packet of shares in many if not most Czech firms. Kozeny's HC&C, for example, emerged with sizeable holdings in a number of leading companies, including two major banks — Komercni and Ceska Sporitelna.[29]

Thus the pattern of ownership in the Czech Republic will probably be a variety of state capitalism similar to Germany or Japan. Power will rest with industrial managers, government ministries and banks, all closely interrelated. Such a configuration is prefigured, e.g., by the way the engineering giant Skoda Pizen was privatized. Siemens was selected as the preferred buyer, but withdrew last October because the government would not take over Skoda's outstanding debts. The Industry Ministry subsequently approved a leveraged buy-out proposal put together by Skoda's former director, Lubomir Soudek. The cash is to come from the Czech banks to whom Skoda Pizen already owed K4.4 billion. The new deal is only possible because of the government's willingess to help/persuade the banks by carrying Skoda's debts.

The Velvet Divorce

Given his alliance with the Civic Democratic Alliance and Christian Democrats, Klaus emerged from the June 1992 elections with a working majority in the Czech parliament. The picture in Slovakia, however, was very different. None of the Czech parties won any seats, while Vladimir Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia polled 34%, the ex-communist Party of the Democratic Left 14%, and the Slovak National Party 10%. This meant that the Federal Assembly was split evenly between the communists, Klaus and Meciar. The latter two quickly agreed that the federal parliament was an unworkable body, and that division of the republic was unavoidable.

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29. A. Robinson, "Keeping in Czech," in *Financial Times* (February 17, 1993).

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Table 2
Political Representation in Czechoslovakia

	Federal Assembly		Czech Parliament	
	votes	seats	votes	seats
Civic Democratic Party	34%	85	30%	76
Left Bloc (Communists)	14%	19	15%	35
Social Democracy	7%	16	7%	16
Republican Party[30]	6%	14	6%	14
Christian Democrats	6%	13	7%	15
Liberal Social Union	6%	12	6%	16
Civic Democratic Alliance	—	—	6%	14
Moravia/Silesia Association	—	—	6%	14

Separation negotiations went surprisingly quickly and smoothly, despite the fact that there was no referendum on the issue and polls showed that only 16% of the people favored the split in June 1992. Even as late as November, only 50% of Czechs and 40% of Slovaks approved of the split. It was widely believed that Meciar was merely using the threat of separation to work out a better deal for Slovakia within a renewed confederation. Klaus, however, ruled out a middle ground: it was either a unitary federation or two separate states. As Meciar started to waver, Klaus made it clear that there would be no federal budget for 1993, agreement or no agreement. After three attempts the federal parliament reluctantly accepted the deal hammered out by Meciar and Klaus and voted itself out of existence. The Czech public remains skeptical about their political leaders, showing little trust in the political parties and the parliament. Yet an AISA poll in February 1993 showed 58% of the public feeling that the economic situation was improving and 64% expressing broad approval for the government's policies.[31]

The Role of Unions in the Transition to the Market[32]

The Restructuring of Labor Unions

Within a week of the student demonstration of November 17, 1989, which launched the "velvet revolution," strike committees appeared in plants around the country. Communist attempts to mobilize workers

30. The Republican Party is a neo-fascist organization led by Dr. Rudolf Sladek, who campaigned hard in the industrial towns of North Bohemia, which are heavily polluted and have large Romany minorities.

31. Czech television news, March 3, 1993.

32. Much of this section is based on interviews conducted with leading officials in the Confederation of Czech and Slovak Trade Unions (CSKOS) headquarters in the Fall of 1991 and Spring of 1992.

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against the students backfired. On November 23 Czech television showed the humiliation of the Prague Communist Party chief addressing a crowd at the CKD Locomotive plant, where he was shouted down by workers chanting "we are not children." The strike committees coordinated the November 29 general strike which brought down the communist government. Police and television trade unions also played a significant role following the November 17 demonstration, organizing petitions and putting pressure on leaders to reform.[33]

Under the leadership of the newly-formed National Association of Strike Committees, the old official union organization, ROH, was quickly dismantled. ROH's 17 industrial unions, which had covered 98% of the labor force, were broken up into 50 new unions (also structured on an industry-wide basis). New leaders were democratically elected to these unions and according to some estimates roughly 80% of the leadership was replaced. Within ROH the real power had resided in the regional councils, which coordinated the work of unions in each province. In January and February 1990 these councils were dissolved and their considerable property holdings (clubs, hotels, etc.) were split up between the unions in proportion to their membership.

On March 3, 1990 a congress of the new unions decided to abolish ROH and create a new organization (CSKOS), with a General Council consisting of the 50 heads of the new unions.[34] Two separate Chambers of Trade Unions were formed in the Czech and Slovak republics, with little coordination between them. CKSOS elected as chairman Igor Pleskot, a former academic who was dismissed from his position in 1968 and became a metalworker. In September 1990 he was replaced by Roman Kovacs, head of the Metalworkers' Union (KOVO), which is the largest union, with 1.2 million members. In June 1990 CKSOS became a full member of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions — the second East European union organization after Solidarity to be granted membership. With the break-up of the Czechoslovak state, in December 1992 CSKOS itself was abolished, leaving the Bohemian and Moravian Chamber of Trade Unions in the Czech Republic.

Unlike Poland and Hungary, no new independent unions have been created outside CSKOS, apart from the unions of cultural workers and some small independent labor organizations, such as the "Labor and Freedom" organization, with 2,000 members. The CSKOS unions cover

33. Bernard Wheaton and Zdenek Kavan, *The Velvet Revolution. Czechoslovakia, 1988-91* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 65, 67.

34. Interview with Alexander Pilar, one of the secretaries of the CSKOS, April 14, 1991.

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perhaps 75% of the labor force (reliable figures are hard to come by). Workers continue to pay their dues, not out of enthusiasm for the role the unions are playing as defenders of their collective interests, but because of the considerable individual benefits membership can bring (access to rest homes and cheap holidays, help in individual disputes with management, etc). Likewise, the main goal of the leaders seems to have been the preservation of their organizations. There is little incentive for the leaders to adopt a confrontational stance, so long as the government continues to allow them to function.

In marked contrast to the role of Solidarity in Poland, Czech unions have had minimal political impact since 1989. There have been virtually no strikes or other forms of labor unrest. Even the Hungarian unions, largely staffed by the old communist personnel, have played a more prominent political role than their Czech counterparts. The main reason is that the Czech unions were seen, and to a degree saw themselves, as a discredited holdover from the communist regime. They are indeed one of the few quasi-political organizations of the old regime to have survived the transition more or less intact. This has to do with the important role played by unions in the 1948 coup: while apparently mere defenders of workers' interests, they in fact served as a front for the Communist Party's seizure of power.[35]

The immediate task facing union leaders after 1989 was simply organizational survival in the face of threats from right-wing deputies in parliament to close them down and confiscate their property. Paradoxically, it is the very strength of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia (both before and after 1989) which accounts for the political exclusion of organized labor and the sharp contrast with Poland and Hungary. Thus the unions were largely shut out of the decision-making process at governmental level as the economic reform program gathered pace. CKSOS was either unwilling or unable to persuade parliamentary deputies to articulate their interests. Many parliamentarians feared that publicly associating themselves with the old Left's labor constituency would be "political suicide." The union leaders themselves recognized the force of this argument: they declined to endorse either parties or individual candidates in the 1990 and 1992 parliamentary elections.

Of course, the communist deputies were willing to voice the workers' interests, but CSKOS did not want to be publicly associated with the Communist Party since this would merely confirm the Right's accusations

35. J. Bloomfield, *Passive Revolution: Politics and the Czechoslovak Working Class, 1945-48* (London: Allison and Busby, 1979).

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that the unions were communist tools. Since the other forces on the parliamentary Left (such as the social democrats) were still very weak, this left the unions with few political options. Another factor encouraging union quiescence was the tendency to still see themselves as quasi-official structures with a responsibility to carry out governmental policy. The idea that their role could be to aggresively defend workers' interests was still relatively novel and they lacked confidence in advancing such a role. Such apparently self-serving behavior by union leaders would ordinarily trigger challenges from the shop-floor. Yet, while polls indicate a high level of distrust among workers about their unions, this has not translated into grass-roots activism.

Towards a Corporatist Consensus?

Despite the fact that the unions were politically neutralized, in the Fall of 1990 they were able to make several significant gains which laid the groundwork for what appeared to be a corporatist framework for managing labor relations along German/Austrian lines. Czech corporatism is distinguished by the fact that the government holds all the cards and both unions and employers are passive participants. At any rate, some clearly corporatist institutions have been created and the outlines of a corporatist *quid pro quo* between the government and organized labor is beginning to emerge. In return for accepting price liberalization and privatization, the government will allow unions to keep their property and continue operating. Union members have taken a sharp cut in real wages. In return, the government has implicitly sought to keep unemployment to a minimum. Its main policy instruments to maintain reasonably full employment have been rapid privatization, encouragement of foreign investment and an under-valued currency. This is very different from the original Thatcherism, which shunned corporatist intermediation and relied on high unemployment to bring labor into line and limit wage inflation.

In September, 1990 a Council of Social and Economic Accord was created to provide a framework for tripartite negotiations at the national level, consisting of 10 representatives of CSKOS, 7 from the employers and 7 from the government. Ironically, it was only at the government's and the unions' urging that employers moved to set up their own organization. (Similar councils were set up in both republics). Secondly, a new Labor Code and Law on Collective Bargaining was adopted in December 1990. This legislation guaranteed basic workers' rights, and laid down the framework for legally binding labor contracts, including compulsory arbitration if the two sides fail to agree and compulsory

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strike ballots.[36] Employers cannot hire replacement workers during a strike, and if no contract is concluded they have the right to a lock-out — in which case the workers are entitled to half-pay.

The unions objected to parts of the draft code, such as those eliminating the right of workers to participate in the selection of managers. The original draft of the new enterprise law, introduced on March 23, included provisions expanding the role of workers' councils. The government, however, led by Economics Minister Vladimir Dlouhy, insisted on removing these clauses. The Metalworkers' Union was able to gather 600,000 signatures in four days on a petition protesting the new code.[37] In several respects the new code fell below the minimum provisions for the protection of workers' interests recommended by the International Labor Organization. Letters from the ICFTU and Lane Kirkland of the AFL-CIO helped to persuade the government to modify the code. Although the final version ruled out worker participation in management (thus falling short of the German *Mitbestimmung*), the provisions on redundancy, sick pay and so forth are fairly generous and conform to ILO standards.

Why did the Czechoslovak government embrace these corporatist institutions while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a Thatcherite leap into a market economy? After all, traditional Thatcherism consisted in no small measure of a direct attack on labor unions' rights. The Czech government's acceptance of corporatism can be attributed to the underlying consensual nature of Czech political culture, a willingess to replicate the labor institutions of neighboring Austria and Germany, and Klaus' own style of avoiding direct confrontations. Tactical considerations also played a part. The neoliberals only had a precarious majority in the parliament elected in June 1990 and chose to concentrate their efforts on putting into place the key planks of the reform program — price liberalization and privatization. Also, labor and social issues in the government were largely in the hands of politicians from the social democratic wing of Civic Forum.

The new labor legislation was introduced with remarkably little political controversy. It was not that the Right struck a deal with the unions: labor guarantees in return for market reform. It was a more indirect process. Perhaps each side implicitly recognized the claims of the other. But it seems more likely that the neoliberals were simply too busy

36. Law of 4 December 1990 on Collective Bargaining.
37. *Prace* (December 18, 1990); *Mlada fronta dnes* (December 19, 1990).

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and too uncertain of the extent of their own support in the country to risk a political showdown with the unions. Also, perhaps the government slowly came to accept that CSKOS was not a stooge of old nomenklatura officials and did to some extent represent its members. Regional differences also played a role. While the Prague workers had backed the communists in 1948, in 1989-90 they swung solidly behind market reform.

In the two years since these corporatist institutions were created, economic reform has accelerated and Klaus has managed to consolidate his political power. The unions have grown increasingly restive, arguing that the government continues to marginalize their role and has even violated some of the agreements. The corporatist structure is still weakly developed. While it exists on paper, there is little real bargaining between employers and labor. Binding agreements are forged at the national level between monopolistic and non-transparent institutions, which are then imposed on lower actors who have little bargaining independence or input. This amounts to what one Czech author has termed "social pseudo-partnership."[38]

Wage Policy

The tripartite council agreed to introduce a new system of binding collective contracts, with pay-related strikes only allowed during the contract negotiation period. The three sides agreed to limit wage increases to 5% for 1991 (subject to quarterly adjustments for retail price inflation), with punitive taxation of employers who violated the guidelines.[39] These limits only applied to SOEs: private firms and joint ventures (SOEs with at least 33% foreign participation) could set whatever wages they liked (although they also had to pay a hefty 50% wage tax). In fact, falling demand and the termination of subsidies meant that most SOEs found themselves unable to pay substantial wage increases and most firms failed to reach the government-imposed ceilings.

The agreement more or less held, although the unions complained that the government was breaking the terms of the agreement by failing to compensate for the fall in real wages. The cost of living rose 9.9% in 1990 and 53.8% in 1991, while nominal wages only rose 16%.[40] Thus

38. Vladislav Flek, "Tarifni Vyjednavani v Obdobi Prechodu k Trni Ekonomice," in *Politicka ekonomie*, Nos. 9-10, 1991, pp. 793-809.

39. Wage increases paid out of costs 3-5% above the ceiling were tamed at 200%, above that of 750%. Bonuses paid out of profits were limited to 20% of the wage bill and, above that, subject to a 750% tax.

40. In the Czech Republic in 1991 the average wage was K4,068, in Slovakia K3,901. *Hosrodarske Noviny* (March 3, 1992); *Statisticke prehledy*, No. 3, 1992.

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real wages fell 24%, although according to the agreement the fall should not have exceeded 12%. Despite union anger, there were no wage-related work stoppages. In 1991 wages fell or stayed the same in 23% of the firms, rose by less than 10% in 6% of firms, rose 10-20% in 65%, and rose more than 30% in 9%.[41] By the end of 1991 polls were showing two thirds of Czechs expressing dissatisfaction with living standards and the social safety net.[42] Negotiations over the 1992 wage agreement were far more acrimonious and failed to produce an agreement.[43] The government simply imposed an 8% wage ceiling without formal approval from the tripartite council.[44] In 1992 Czech industrial wages rose by 18% in nominal terms to reach K4,523 ($160) per month. The unions went along with the government partly because of their political impotence and partly because they accepted the logic of the labor market and traded-off low wages for full employment.

Income Maintenance

Unions were able to win agreement on an income maintenance program which guaranteed a minimum income in February 1991 of K1,500 a month ($53), and a minimum wage of K2,000 ($68).[45] The unions were worried that, with the price of necessities increasing rapidly, workers on low incomes would be in dire poverty. However, the new minimum wage also compressed wage differentials, to the annoyance of skilled workers.[46] According to Petr Miller, Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, 150,000 families with 600,000 persons were below the K1,200 per head poverty line in mid 1991. In July 1991 the CSKOS withdrew from the tripartite negotiations in a bid to force a 10% increase in the minimum wage. For 1992 the minimum wage was raised to K2,200 and the poverty line to K1,700. In September 1992 the unions again withdrew from negotiations, claiming that the promised cost-of-living adjustment had not been implemented.

Most of the 8% of workers earning less than K2,000 were concentrated in the textile industry, where average pay was K1,800, with many

41. *Lidove Noviny* (March 25, 1992). The highest wages by sector were in finance (K5,522, 57% rise) and foreign trade (KS,033, 32% rise). The lowest wages were in retailing (K3,296, 10% rise) and municipal services K3,207 12% rise).
42. Institute for Public Opinion Research poll, cited in *Ecoservice* (December 2, 1991).
43. K. Kriz, "Karentena," in *Lidove Noviny* (May 11, 1992), p. 1.
44. Firms face no penalties for raises 3% in excess of the ceiling, but must pay a 200% tax on raises of 3-5%, and 750% for raises above 5%.
45. *Lidove noviny* (January 30, 1991).
46. *Prace* (September 1, 1991).

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young girls earning only K1,400. The introduction of the minimum wage immediately caused cash flow problems for textile mills, and in March 1991 the measure was suspended for the textile industry. The textile mills nevertheless expected to lose 80,000 jobs — 40% of their workforce.[47] The financial weakness of the textile industry is indicative of the fact that for decades past heavy industry was privileged in terms of the level of wages and investment provided from the state budget.

Although the freeing of prices in January 1991 hit the poor hard, the government has stopped short of liberalizing the cost of housing and utilities in municipal-owned apartments (where some 40% of the population live). Rent accounts for a mere 2.7% of household spending and covers only 24% of housing operating costs, which means that the state had to provide an annual subsidy of K4.8bn.[48] Even after Klaus' victory in the 1992 elections, calls by the libertarian Civic Democratic Alliance to radically raise rents have been blocked in parliament.

Unemployment

The CKSOS accepted the prospect of unemployment. At first there were only a few sackings because the old labor legislation still in force mandated prior union approval before any workers could be fired. By December 1990 there were 60,000 registered unemployed (less than 1% of the labor force), but as subsidies to SOEs were slashed unemployment rose, peaking at 231,000 (4.4%) in the Czech Republic in January 1992 (and 12.7% in Slovakia). Thus 3,500 out of 20,000 workers were fired at the Poldi steel mill in Kladno, while in Prague CKD shed 10,000 of its 28,000 workers, and the aircraft plant Let Kunovice fired 900 of 4000 employees — all without significant protests. Under the new legislation, sacked workers receive 2-5 months severance pay; and unemployed workers registering for work receive benefits for one year (60% of their former wage, falling to 50% after six months). The only serious challenge seems to have come from miners, and even their response has been fairly muted. The unions' willingness to accept redundancies in feminized sectors is indicative of the gender bias pervasive in Czech society. Several of those interviewed volunteered comments along the lines that "A lot of these girls were not really productive workers anyway."

The labor force in both republics fell by 800,000 in 1991 — considerably more than the 450,000 who registered as unemployed. 65,000

47. *Prace* (August 26, 1991). For example, on August 1 Modeta Jihlava fired 1300 employees — 50% of its workforce.
48. *Ecoservice* (December 8, 1992).

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of the remainder were workers who took jobs abroad. Most were women and pensioners who dropped out of the labor market, documenting the phenomenon of over-full employment in the socialist economy.[49] In addition, some 154,000 workers in 224 enterprises were on short weeks in 1991, with subsidies from the Ministry of Labor.[50] By the end of 1992, thanks to the contraction in the labor force and the rising private sector, registered unemployed had fallen to 2.5% in the Czech Republic — among the lowest in Europe.[51] Unemployment fell slightly in Slovakia too, but still remained at 10.4%. Of course, this apparent failure to extend the implicit social contract of near-full employment to Slovakia was one of the key factors in the break-up of the federal state.

Privatization

The unions accepted the inevitability of privatization and recognized that their members supported a market economy. Indeed, some union leaders welcomed privatization, hoping that once new owners were in place the unions could bargain for improved conditions and break free from the government's wage controls. Nationally, the goal of CSKOS was to gain legitimacy. Unions have no formal role (e.g., right of approval) in the drawing up of privatization projects now under way in state enterprises, but in practice they seemed to be informally involved. At the level of the republic, unions were given some seats on panels reviewing privatization projects in the Ministry of Industry. The rapidly expanding small private sector remains completely unorganized, with many of the new firms simply refusing to allow their workers to join unions.

All Quiet on the Labor Front

Late 1990 saw the first flurry of strike activity, coinciding with the unions' attempts to influence the passage of the new Labor Code. On December 11 workers in the Budvar brewery went on strike demanding independence from the South Bohemia Breweries trust, which did not want to lose control over its profitable subsidiary.[52] The ministry

49. Interview with Labor Minister P. Miller in *Hospodarske noviny* (May 13, 1992). The labor force contracted by a further 12% in 1992. Further study would be needed to establish what proportion of these people voluntarily left the labor market and how many left because of lack of job opportunities or the termination of unemployment benefits.

50. *Ecoservice* (October 11, 1991).

51. *Rude pravo* (December 8, 1992).

52. *Lidove noviny* (November 12, 1990); *Mlada fronta dnes* (December 12, 1990; interviews at the plant January 1992.

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overruled the trusts' objections and gave the plant its independence. In North Bohemia, the government dropped a plan to split the region's mines into 13 independent trusts in the face of strike threats from miners who feared pit closures.[53] October 1991 saw another wave of strike threats. On October 1, 4,000 railway drivers staged a one hour strike, calling for the dismissal of the federal transport minister, protesting the lack of clear plans for the restructuring of the sector. On October 12 miners in the Ostrava region walked out to block government plans to abolish the special miners' pension privileges inherited from the old regime. The Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs yielded to the miners four hours into the strike, guaranteeing their special pensions until the year 2016.[54]

The privatization process *per se* has sparked virtually no labor unrest in the Czech Republic. Consider the purchase of the Skoda factory in Mlada Boleslav by Volkswagen, who promised $6 billion in new investment, making the transaction the largest cross-national deal in world history. The Czech unions cooperated closely with Volkswagen unions in creating a collective bargaining structure for the Skoda works, and threatened to strike when they heard that their managers were trying to block the planned takeover,[55] which went through in April 1991. Immediately thereafter most of the old Czech managers who had negotiated the deal were promptly fired.

In August 1991 local unions issued a strike threat which succeeded in halting plans to auction six dams in east Bohemia to private bidders. On October 24 1991 the agricultural union organized a rally of 20,000 farmers on Wenceslas Square. They demanded more subsidies and a tax holiday for private farmers. The government backed off from a confrontation with farmers (and the rural electorate), and kept the subsidies flowing. The Plzen Brewery trade union entered a strike alert on May 5, 1992 to protest plans to merge the world-famous brewery into a joint venture with the Dutch brewers De Groen/Interbeer.[56] The union proposed a rival privatization project (47% of shares to coupons, 15% to managers), which included a marketing agreement with Heineken.

There has been considerable unrest among workers in state organizations who saw their budgets squeezed and salaries eroded by inflation.

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53. *Mlada fronta dnes* (December 19, 1990).

54. One week after this strike, the author asked Klaus whether the concessions did not violate his free market principles. Klaus simply denied knowledge of the deal, pointing out that he had been in Thailand when the strike occurred.

55. *Mlada fronta dnes* (November 12, 1990).

56. A. Kudrnova, "Kauza Plzenske Pivovary," in *Respekt* (April 17, 1992), p. 5.

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On April 27, 1992 teachers demonstrated in Prague, which Czech Education Minister Petr Vopenka blamed on "red trade unions."[57] The next day medical doctors also demonstrated in front of the parliament. Slovak unions have been more active, with the metalworkers' union holding a one hour warning strike in November 1991 to demand a lifting of the wage limits, more subsidies, price controls and a reduction in the payroll tax.[58] The Czech metalworkers' union, however, did not join in the token stoppage.

Conclusion

The Czech Republic is one of the few success stories in the transition from socialism to capitalism. This process has progressed peacefully, with little social disruption. A system of parliamentary parties has emerged, along with a government committed to following the standard stages of an orthodox IMF program: stabilization, liberalization and privatization. The break-up of the federation, however, raises doubts. While the split with Slovakia would probably have occurred no matter what economic strategy Prague adopted, this remains speculation and critics can argue that the cost of the transition was the break-up of the federation. On the other hand, the privatization of large-scale industry seems to have proceeded more successfully than even its architects could have hoped. In the space of a year one quarter of Czech industry has been transferred from state to private owners. The economy has retained its macro-economic balance, while the downward slide of industrial output finally ended in October 1992.

Klaus' transplantation of Thatcherite principles to East European soil, however, has more to do with his canny understanding of the political and economic culture of the Czech lands than with his adherence to IMF orthodoxy. He appealed to the Czechs' self-perception as Europeans, and to their willingness to shoulder collective sacrifices to produce concrete results. Thus he has institutionalized a curious form of Thatcherism involving corporatist institutions managing labor relations and a willingness to steer economic policy to maintain near-full employment. This is not to underestimate the depth of the social divisions unleashed by Klaus' program or the considerable economic hardship in Czech society, particularly among pensioners. However, there was a strong risk that Klaus' program would be strangled in its cradle by

57. *Svobodne slovo* (April 28, 1992).
58. *Mlada front dnes* (November 25, 1991).

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an unholy alliance of communists and Slovak nationalists. Inasmuchas this did not happen and the program is still on course, it must be considered a success.

As for labor unions, they face two major challenges in the new Czech Republic. First, they must search out political allies and find themselves a voice in parliament. The relative strength of the Communist Party in the Czech Republic, before and after 1989, explains much of the quiescence of organized labor in the Czech lands in contrast to Poland and Hungary. Second, the unions must adapt themselves to the newly emerging market economy. As the economy recovers, one can expect them to move out from their focus on income-maintenance issues — a temporary stratagem for acquiring political legitimacy.

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The Changing Character of the Prague Intelligentsia

Caroline Bayard

The April 1991 Prague conference on "Intellectuals and Power," organized by the journal *Prostor*, might have set the tone for the Czech intelligentsia of the next decade. While it is unfair to generalize about the Czech intelligentsia solely on the basis of a single conference attended by a few dozen academics, the *Prostor* conference did prefigure those tensions that emerged afterwards. At that time the participants assumed that nationalist temptations were an exclusively Slovak predilection and beyond the purview of sophisticated Prague intellectuals. Most of the latter did not even bother to argue about such matters. The likely conclusion seemed to be that to "let the poor devils from Bratislava go as they please" was a reasonable course of action. Delayed through a variety of questionable devices, now no longer operative, it was neither irrational nor unreasonable to accept the inevitable. Such an account would have been wrong. Yet that particular gathering did focus on substantive issues such as the re-emergence of an active political life after years of cynicism and the ecological devastation facing post-communist states.[1]

1. Thus they derided Francis Fukuyama and were scathing in their mistrust of the press coverage of the Gulf War. Václav Belohradsky in particular, who had shared his time the preceding two years teaching political science in Trieste and Prague, pointed out that, for all its hyper-reality and video games effects, it had become the first invisible war of the post-communist period. See his "Intelektualové a Moc Conference," in *Prostor*, Vol. IV, No. XVI (April 1991), p. 27, where he develops a critique of the war similar to Jean Baudrillard's *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu* (Paris: Galilée, 1991).

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The Intellectuals and the Split

In July 1991 most Prague intellectuals seemed to have been mesmerized by Václav Klaus' siren songs.[2] No one had given up on Václav Havel yet, but most of them had already shifted their support to Klaus. While other sectors of society seemed to have a healthy skepticism about the ability of any politician to make much difference, many academics expressed approval of the elections results. They saw Klaus as a pragmatist seeking to deliver the Czechs from 44 years of incompetent management, with the help of experts capable of striking deals with aggressive German and American entrepreneurs. When Havel chose to resign from the federation rather than preside over its demise, the electorate's capacity to choose a different government in the voting booth became dubious.[3] The speed with which Klaus and Meciar rammed the decision to separate through their respective parliaments surprised everyone. Was secession revocable? How often had it happened? Such were the questions people such as Blanka Richova and Dusan Trestik asked between 1991 and 1992. Efforts to define "federation," "confederation" and "autonomy" should have been the focus of general political debate and not only of a handful of intellectuals. It did not happen, and when pro-federalists tried to mobilize large segments of the population in support of the federation they failed miserably.

While Paul Wilson saw this as a velvet divorce — an arrangment fashioned after many communist era divorces, which saw estranged

2. See "Civic Forum Split," in *Keesing's Record of World Events* (February 1991), p. 38. The agreement to form separate groups was worked out on February 10, 1991, at the Presidential residence in Lang, then finalized on February 23. Václav Klaus formed the Civic Democratic Party on the Right, while Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier and the Czech Premier Petr Pithart set up the Civic Movement on the Left (also referred to as the Liberal Club). Havel himself, who counted many Liberal Club supporters among his closest associates, did not take sides. Although there had been ample warning, at the time it was difficult to foresee the humiliating end of the *Civic Forum*. There had been the break-up of the *Civic Forum* on February 23, 1991, an "inevitable and amicable divorce" of the majority coalition which in June 1990 had formed the first democratically elected government in Czechoslovakia in 42 years. While that split was initially meant to allow the government to concentrate on pressing economic issues and to draft a constitution, it only brought the government to a virtual standstill before the June 6, 1992 elections.

3. Milan Znoj has suggested that Carl Schmitt's warnings about the threats to democratic regimes had as much relevance in 1992 as in the 1920s. He wrote that parliamentary democracies lack guarantees against parties taking over the running of a government and that watching both Klaus and Meciar preside over the destruction of the state exemplified that predicament. Znoj further questioned Klaus' conflation of liberal/individual mores with the determination to eliminate abortion rights and bring back family values. See Milan Znoj, "Revolucni Konzervatismus u nás," in *Pritomnost*, No. VIII, 1992, pp. 10-11.

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partners remain within the same abode because of the chronic housing shortage[4] — to Petr Prihoda "it was a tragic play, the spectacle of orphaned children thrown in a whirlpool of life they know little about, because forty years of non-freedom had concealed problems as much as deprived them of an even minimal understanding of their impact."[5] Prihoda had sought to elaborate possible alternatives to the Czech-Slovak imbroglio and had suggested three possible scenarios. The first, a referendum in both republics concerning Slovakia's independence (which was what Havel requested in his March 14, 1991 radio address).[6] Such a referendum never did take place, in part because parliamentarians could not agree on the wording of the question to be put to the electorate. But in the Fall of 1991, Prihoda began to have doubts about this option, especially if the referendum were won by a slim margin in favor of the *status quo* — the worst of all possible outcomes because the Czech-Slovak conundrum would continue as before until the federation's final break-up. The second scenario was a gradual disassembly of the federation after a mutual agreement. While recognizing that it would not be easy, Prihoda added that "it still would offer a chance for future good neighborly relations." If this sounded optimistic, the third scenario appeared downright utopian after the January 1993 split: both communities could and should heal themselves as well as create different understandings of each other. In Prihoda's words, the journalists' accounts of those antagonisms dividing Czechs and Slovaks played a key role in the steady deterioration of their relations. At that time he felt weary about the fact that: "the only things now common to [both Czechs and Slovaks] are the communication networks, transportation systems, and engineering projects such as sewage and garbage disposal."[7] Not surprisingly, he quoted a book by Julien Benda which has strong symbolic connotations for the Czechs precisely because they had paid such a hefty price for the blindness of West European governments to the militarization of Nazi Germany.[8]

How did Slovaks and Czech intellectuals betray their compatriots once they emerged from communism? According to Prihoda, by neglecting to

4. See Paul Wilson, "Czechoslovakia: the Pain of Divorce," in *The New York Review of Books* (Dec. 17, 1992), pp. 69-74.

5. Petr Prihoda, "Ceské Dilemna: Slováci" in *Pritomnost*, No. X (Oct. 1991), pp. 1-2.

6. *World News Digest* (March 1991), No. LI, pp. 224-225.

7. Prihoda, "Ceské Dilemna: Slováci," *op. cit*, p. 2.

8 Julien Benda first published *La trahison des clercs* in 1927. It was translated into English in 1928 as *The Great Betrayal* (London: Routledge), then again in 1969 as *The Treason of Intellectuals* (New York: Norton)

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indicate "what they shared: the feeling of a small nation of an uncertain existence, surrounded by powerful neighbors."[9] Somehow those political bonds had stopped being convincing. Prihoda's argument, however, becomes less convincing when its author charges "those irresponsible image-makers" with the cardinal sin of "misrepresenting the two nations' wills." The main factor is that today the favored bogeyman before 1918 — fear of the Germans — no longer existed. According to Jan Sokol, the editor of *Pritomnost*, it was not that the Czech intelligentsia had suddenly lost the sense of responsibility it had demonstrated with Charter 77 or that journalists had suddenly lost sight of the Masarykian liberal vision of a democratic state. Rather, by 1992 such a vision of a unitary state had become obsolete. For Sokol, Prihoda's explanation in terms of the failure of both the press and the intelligentsia in their duty to protect the federation was questionable. The most gifted image-makers and the intelligentsia can only work with what they have. As he put it, Prihoda overestimated the power of electronic magic and journalists' *coup-de-main* to transform a chaotic polity into a workable federation.

Sokol's account of the Czech-Slovak split is more realistic about the limits not only of the press but of any intelligentsia. Two of his recent articles are worth mentioning here. The first examines the concept of statehood for both Czechs and Slovaks in order to diagnose the reasons of the demise of the federation. It was a matter of historically situating both cultures, first in relation to the West, in the context of the 1918 Pittsburgh agreement and the 1919 Versailles Treaty, then in relation to the East, both in 1945 and 1989.[10] Sokol rejects the classic Masarykian concept of a successful polity, according to which "the durability of states depends on of the ideas which presided over their beginnings." Instead, he proposes a different interpretation of the loss of the federation of "the place where the seeds of discord were sown." He does not deny that the 19th century popular construction of Czech history as a secular struggle on behalf of humanism and democracy contributed to the creation of a democratic state at Versailles. He insists, however, that "this federation was an artificial entity whose emphasis on the concept of the nation-state frightened both the German minority and the Slovak opposition from the very beginning." Hence the famous Czech misunderstanding, whereby the Czechs thought they had come home, while they were perceived as appropriating a friendly kin's territory. This is the source of the complicated "legal tangle" which found new life after 1989. The common

9. Prihoda, "Ceské Dilemna: Slováci," *op. cit*, pp. 1-2.
10. Jan Sokol, "Staty a ideje," in *Pritomnost*, No. VI (June1992), pp. 1-2.

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bond had been the fear of Hungarians and Germans. In 1918 it persuaded the Slovaks, but in 1938 it only made sense to people in Bohemia. After 1945 and the expulsion of the federation's German minority, it became obsolete. Sokol sees the final shipwreck of Marxism-Leninism in 1989 as the major cause for the disintegration of the fragile 1918 federation. When Marxism-Leninism perished, so did the artificially constructed state on which Masaryk had set such high hopes.

Sokol is not persuaded by the inner qualities of the Masarykian ideal, but he recognizes that in the wake of Marxism-Leninism's "enormous, rapid and well-deserved disintegration one would have to be blind not to diagnose the unfortunate weakening of a great many worthwhile leftist ideas" inherited from the preceding two centuries. He is disturbed by the present waves of resentment against that legacy as a whole, and against rationalism in particular. As a social democrat, he cannot give up the "third way," which other liberal West Europeans have already confined to the dustbin of history.[11] He is reluctant to abandon Willy Brandt's definition of Europeanism, i.e., a vision which would not undermine nation-states but inscribe them within a larger economic and cultural union (in this case the EC). Sokol begs the question of the relevance of a project evolved in West Germany in the 1970s to an immensely different Europe in the 1990s. Is it possible today to be a loyal defender of the nation-state, a Europeanist, and a believer in the third way? How relevant are such options to a post-communist economy still reeling under the shock of recent political and socio-economic changes? His answer is that they are relevant to social democrats, and he insists that an enlightened Czech Republic should not only accept Slovakia's choice to go it alone but also hope to join the Common Market in a not so distant future.[12] On the latter point he is not far from Klaus in deciding to split the dysfunctional federation. This helps understand Klaus' success in doing what others were secretly wishing, but were not sufficiently cynical and pragmatic to carry out.

Maastricht and the January 1993 Split

Sokol's second article focuses on European unification, its dysfunctions, resistance against its homogenizing tendencies, and potential lessons for Central Europe. He sees a remarkable coincidence between this sour break-up of the 74 year old federation and the EC's vicissitudes

11. Ralf Darhendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990).

12. Jan Sokol, "Evropou obchazi strasidlo státopravniho usporadání," *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

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on the way to a single market. According to him, Danish and French resistance to homogenization and the humiliating results of the EC's 1992 referenda should be seen as positive rather than negative democratic interventions. Such decisions signalled specific and necessary correctives, as well as the need to protect the vulnerable identities of communities threatened by the homogenizing tendencies of an increasingly bureaucratized EC.[13] Both decisions highlighted dividing lines felt all across the political spectrum of the two Europes. This is neither the consequence of the Left hostility to unification, nor of the Right's drive to integrate all European economies. Thus the French September 1992 Referendum saw both the National Front and the Communist Party in opposition to European integration. Sokol interprets the re-emergence of nationalism in his part of the world as "the inevitable by-product of several decades of communist rule" and registers the EC's frustrations in the face of global homogenization as resistance to threatening changes. Looking back on the last 74 years, "the present trials never were a pure concoction of the Slovaks' dangerous brand of nationalism. Today, at long last, it has become clear that the federation never had a chance to become a reality. When we compare its last 20 years with the three decades or more of the EC, after its laborious beginnings with Adenauer and De Gaulle, the contrasts are clear."[14] Federations and economic communities take time and patience. They cannot be imposed against the people's will. Emanuel Mandler was even more dismissive of Masaryk's liberal vision when he curtly stated that "the old man's federation simply ran amuck"[15] It was a seriously flawed tradition which was never elaborated politically but merely passed on without dealing with the skeletons in the nation's closet.

Masaryk's Legacy and the Intelligentsia

Two extreme positions — the purgatory to which Masaryk's critics (Mandler, Trestik, Richova)[16] want to confine the founder's vision and the attempts by others (Petr Prihoda, Ladislav Heydanek, Ales Lederer, Milosolav Bednar) to transform that legacy into a viable policy for the

13. Cohen Tanugi, *L'Europe en danger* (Paris: Fayard, 1992).
14. Jan Sokol, "Evropou ochazi strasidlo státopravniho," *op. cit.*
15. Emanuel Mandler, "Liberální politika musela byt v opozic," in *Pritomnost*, No. VI (June 1992), pp. 12-14.
16. Blanka Richova, "Demokracie a minulost u nas" in *Pritomnost*, No. VIII (August 1992), pp.1-2.

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1990's — were very clear in the April 1991 Prostor conference. It is tempting to suggest that since the present national imbroglio started with the solutions Thomas Masaryk proposed at the end of the 19th century, a final, symbolic burial may at long last be in order. It is no coincidence that, at a time when his political edifice is falling apart, the historical construction he grounded it on is undergoing careful scrutinies. Eva Hartmannová's recent re-examination of the foundational myths of the 1918 Republic and 19th century nationalism[17] concludes that, because Masaryk succeeded in weaving a selected number of narratives into an effective foundational myth in *The Czech Question* (1884), he not only invented a tradition but also managed to persuade the Versailles Treaty's hosts that it was a viable political project.

Hartmannová emphasizes how this construct threatened the old communist regime, which therefore suppressed all standard works on nationalism — even 18th century Central European texts which, by the mid-1940s, had disappeared from Prague University's archives as well as from public libraries. She is not alone in recommending a careful rereading of the history of nationalism, although her conclusions are both less pessimistic than Trestik's, Gellner's or Richova's and more pragmatic than Prihoda's and Heydanek's. Yet the last two years do not indicate that the scholarly detachment she advocates is very popular among intellectuals and politicians. Both the legacy of the First Republic as well as its errors, flaws and misjudgments are being studied for what light they can shed on the present predicament. So, while Hartmannova does not deal with the divisions presently fracturing the Czech intelligentsia, there seem to be two main positions *vis-à-vis* this legacy, rightly perceived as the bedrock of the now defunct state. The first seeks to identify the positive contributions of Masaryk's heritage and to salvage those elements which may remain viable as well as to correct its deficiencies. Havel is part of this respectful generation, but he is not alone in seeking to protect the now dilapidated 1918 heirloom. Most of those sharing his outlook are in their fifties and sixties as Prihoda, Heydanek and Lederer (Bednar being an exception).[18] The second is held by those groups composed of critics who have decided that the heirloom has been such a

17. Eva Hartmannová, "Nacionalismus," in *Pritomnost*, No. IX, 1991, p. 21.

18. Miloslav Bednar, in "Postmodern stadium Ceského historika a cesky stát," *Pritomnost*, No. VIII (August 1992), p.30, questions the post-November 1989 tendency to deconstruct everything under the sun. In particular, Bednar focuses on a number of essays by Trestik which had called for a re-examination of both the first Republic and the notion of a Christianized Europe.

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source of problems that the sooner politicians reject it the better. It is composed of young scholars such as Richova or Petricek as well as people such as Belohradsky, who has skilfully retraced the continuity linking the role of intellectuals in that particular liberal tradition to their subsequent role under communism. For all three, not only Masaryk's heritage but the expectations of an intelligentsia raised on its ideas need to be thoroughly re-examined.[19]

It is enlightening to re-read the polemics between traditional Czech liberals, or frustrated Masarykian idealists (a good many of them signers of Charter 77) and younger scholars such as Belohradsky. In between these two poles, there were a large number of intermediary positions, choosing neither martyrdom nor entrepreneurship. Concerning the actuality of Masaryk's legacy, most of them criticized the "philosopher-king syndrome" for contributing neither to philosophical thought nor to practical politics.[20] In the context of the *Prostor* conference, Zdenek Pinc, Pavel Kouba and Ales Lederer criticized the confusions of that particular politico-philosophical heritage as well as its influence on Havel and some of his close collaborators such as Petr Piethart.

For Kouba, Havel's anti-political politics articulated a "moral horizon" defining political behavior — a tendency he sees reflected in the impact Josef Safarik's work[21] has had on the ex-President. This is particularly true for the power motive, which both Havel and Safarik describe as corrupt, thus exibiting all the contradictions inherent in such a conviction when enunciated by those holding political office. Contrary to Aviezer Tucker,[22] Kouba insisted that Havel's political thought has little

19. Here Richova, Petricek and Belohradsky find themselves close to other Central and East European intellectuals. Interventions by Georgy Konrad and Blaga Dimitrova on the subject of the changes in the role and responsibility of intellectuals in a post-communist world during the conference on "Intellectuals and Social Change in Eastern Europe," which took place one year, almost to the day, after the *Prostor* conference at Rutgers University, were very similar to Belohradsky's pleas. See *Partisan Review*, Vol. LIX, No. IV (Special October 1992 Issue), pp. 559-567.

20. Zdenek Pinc and Pavel Kouba, in "Diskuse," *Prostor*, No. XVI (April 1991), p. 22, specifically criticized the Christian conflation of politics and salvation. Kouba stresses that although such a conflation may well have proceeded from a misinterpretation of the New Testament, it nonetheless dominated a large part of European history up to the present, when this eschatology was conveniently transferred into the Marxist utopia.

21. Josef Safarik, *Cestou & Poslednimu* (Atlantis: Brno, 1992).

22. Aviezer Tucker, in "Václav Havel's Heideggerianism," *Telos* 85 (Fall 1990), pp. 63-78. For a similar analysis, see Dusan Trestik, *Krest Stredni Evropy*, *op. cit.*, which focuses on a return, not to Europe, but somewhere before it, to the still more promising truth of paganism as a foundational myth.

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affinity with Heideggerianism. Rather, both recent political developments and Havel's writings between the late 1970s and the early 1990s had to be seen in terms of a complex nostalgia linked to the Protestant Reformation. For Pinc, on the other hand, it was Piethart who was a tragi-comical example of "the intellectual in government": someone lost in theory and unable to make the simplest decisions.

Belohradsky saw Heydanek's key figure in Czech culture, the philosopher-king leading his people to the promised land, as one of the legacies of totalitarianism. Initially the pretext for the *Prostor* conference had been the Czech translation of Martin Buber's "Plato and Isaiah,"[23] a work regarded by the conference organizers as "the best introduction to the problematic position of Central European intellectuals in the 1990s." What stood out in the discussion was Belohrasky's determination to challenge a certain vision of intellectuals — one which Charter 77 had not questioned. According to Belohradsky, totalitarianism had been the product of that particular class.[24] Much of Belohradsky's anger was aimed at Antonin Liehm, who had identified intellectuals as "the main victims of the totalitarian state."[25] A reformed communist who had been one of the key figures of the Prague Spring, Liehm had described the 1950s and 1960s as "a dark tunnel in which he and his friends found themselves, from which they could only hope to escape."[26] Belohradsky charged that the only tunnel he knew was the privileging of the intelligentsia and that the latter had willingly participated in the Stalinist project. Here Belohradsky anticipated the kind of analysis subsequently developed by a number of other Central European intellectuals at a conference held a year later in the US (April 9-11, 1992).[27] This account leaves the intellectuals today as a loose group of entrepreneurs in an economic market occupied primarily by capitalists and labor unions. In other words, intellectuals are seen as merely selling a product. Recent articles by Belohradsky[28] and Heydanek[29] exemplify the gap between the legacy

23. Originally published in *Israel and the World; Essays in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), "Plato and Isaiah" can now also be found in Will Hersberg, ed., *The Writings of Martin Buber* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 279-280.

24. "Diskuse," *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

25. *Ibid.* p 27.

26. *Ibid.* p. 26.

27. *Partisan Review*, *op. cit.*

28. Cf. Václav Belohradsky, "Co je Liberální democracie?," in *Pritomnost*, No. II, (February 1990), pp. 22-23; "Levice za vymírání svetlusek," in *Mladá Fronta Dnes* (March 28, 1992), p.29; "Levice planetarní dobe," in *Mladá Fronta Dnes* (January 30, 1992), p. 11.

29. Cf. Ladislav Heydanek, "Musí Democracie Resignovat na Pravdu?" in *Literarní Noviny*, No. XXXI, Vol. X, 1991, pp. 1-3, which challenges postmodern skepticism and

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of Masaryk's idealism and a more recent secular version rooted in the disillusion with Marxist theory in the 1970s.

Neo-Liberalism, Klausian Rhetoric and the Intellectuals

By June 1992 it became clear that the crumbling of the delicate national consensus created by the Versailles Treaty could only be replaced by the kind of casino capitalism Dahrendorf had predicted. There were not enough Heydaneks to impose Masarykian options. Klaus' neo-liberal rhetoric, of which Belohradsky may be the most sophisticated spokesman, is also the script for a new, however crude, social contract. The latter comes out as a caricature of the worst forms of West European neo-liberalism. At any rate, Klaus has won. The ambiguities of Havel's postmodernism did not help, nor did his politically disastrous tendency to fuse morality with politics — a meaningful option when fighting communism, but an absurd one when managing a sick economy and an even sicker national soul.

In a perceptive analysis of Havel's predicament, Petr Fidelius questioned the wisdom of demonizing power when one was still in the political fray. To confuse public service with morality results in a series of misunderstandings, the first being that political practice is turned into an exercise in virtue and a demonstration of one's moral righteousness at the expense of practical considerations. One can be a paragon of virtue and a thoroughly incompetent politician, as apparently a number of dissidents have amply demonstrated.[30]

Here, however, it is not merely a question of Havel's mistrust of power while being the presidential candidate, but of his deep affinities with a postmodernism suspicious of hierarchies, mistrustful of dichotomies, critical of the Hegelian dialectic and of utopian thinking, skeptical of any form of social engineering.[31] Yet the tandem Havel/Klaus, one as prime minister, the other as figurehead president (however disastrous such a position may turn out for the first when faced with the latter) has

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uncontrollable consumerism; "Pravda o Konci Moderny není koncem Pravdy," in *Literarní Noviny*, Vol. XI, No. XL (April 4 ,1992), p. 3, which challenges both Belohradsky and Petricek concerning the end of philosophy; and "Filosof a politická Odpovednost," in *Ceská Mysl*, No. I, 1991, pp. 6-7.

30. Petr Fidelius, "Moralka Politice," *Literarní Noviny*, Vol. III, No. XXI (June 1992), pp. 1-2.

31. See Havel's Davos speech, partially reprinted in *The New York Times* (March 1, 1992), E-15. See also my "Intellectuals in the Postmodern Age: East/West Contrasts," in *Philosophy Today* (Winter 1990), p. 291-302, and "Václav Havel and the End of Modernity," in *Open Letter* (Fall-Winter 1991), pp. 83-101.

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an unsurprising outcome. As Trestik has recently put it, each satisfies deeply felt needs.[32] Klaus fulfills historical expectations molded by the old Habsburg heritage (fastidiousness, responsibility, bureaucratic passion for minutia), while his counterpart resists totalities and opposes the blind force of power (as a Jan Hus, a Komensky, a Radl or a Patocka) with the integrity of his personal example. This was exactly what Fidelius meant when he wrote about Havel's capacity for turning political praxis into a sacred duty.

Along with Sokol and Gellner, Trestik tends to read the end into the beginning: to decipher 1993 through the muddy tea leaves of 1918. The insurance policy Slovakia offered the Czechs at Versailles turned out to be the time bomb of 1939, a determining factor in the post-1968 normalization, and eventually the key to the 1993 disintegration. According to Trestik, the merging of statehood and citizenship never happened in Slovakia. Had it taken place, it probably would have led to the creation of a Western-style modern Czechoslovakia within the context of a meaningful federation with Czech and Slovak identities. But because of different modernization and industrialization processes (the latter only taking place in Slovakia during the normalization period), it now looks as if national emancipation can only be completed in Slovakia "by gaining an internationally recognized sovereignty."[33] Here Trestik's disagreement with Prihoda runs deep, not just on the issue of Masaryk but also on "the wisdom of trying to put oneself in Slovakia's shoes, to feel what they are collectively experiencing." What is the responsibility of intellectuals in such a situation? Trestik sees it as the willingness to face the consequences of the present trauma (his term): the refusal to bury one's head in the sand or blame others.

A Consensus for the 1990s ?

Throughout these debates there seems to be a lingering consensus which Havel's supporters and critics have willy-nilly maintained. It seems to gravitate around the need of not occluding unresolved differences or the various weaknesses of their polity. Richova speaks about the need to stop believing that: "we can, or should, liquidate the leftovers, real or imaginary, of our past system, as such steps only lead to the renewal of a totalitarian system,"[34] and she stresses the importance

32. Dusan Trestik, "Idea Státu ceskoslovenského," in *Pritomnost*, No. V, 1992, pp. 14-15.
33. *Ibid.* p. 15.
34. Blanka Richova, "Demokracie a minulost v nás," in *Pritomnost*, No. VIII (1992), pp. 1-2.

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of a personal experience of democracy. Yet two wild swings between optimism and pessimism of the last three years reflect the political immaturity of the Czech electorate. Similarly, Miroslav Petricek and Rudolf Stary argue for a critique of utopian leanings in both their Left or Right versions.[35] Petricek interprets a specific Central European sensitivity to history rather differently than the Dean of Charter 77, Heydanek, who refuses to condemn the last 43 years as a tragic waste, while calling for a measured evaluation of gains and failures. Heydanek is not about to embrace Western versions of democracy, nor their various consumerist proclivities. Petricek, on the other hand, would like to see a sterner historical evaluation of the 1948-1989 period.[36] These analyses, whatever the intelligentsia's predilections for Klaus' pragmatics, indicate that Czech intellectuals have neither lost their critical sense nor chosen a homogeneous direction. A meticulous examination of the various positions articulated in the *Prostor* conference reveals a subtle mistrust of the present premier as well as of his managerial team by the editors of this periodical.

Rudolf Stary warned against the totalitarianism of the Right and pointed out that the utopian tendencies of scientific socialism were finding an unexpected second life with neo-liberal free-market economists.[37] This interpretation was shared even by Belohradsky, who criticized Klaus' 1991 editorials in *Literarni Noviny* as betraying such leanings. In a series of subsequent articles, Belohradsky has further elaborated various forms such nostalgic leanings have taken among hard-core Stalinists and authoritarian neo-liberals.[38] A similar warning has been issued by Jiri Musil, who has written extensively on recent Czech history. He also sees a strange phenomenon of the re-emergence of heretofore extinct paradigms as one of democracy's ambiguous and double-edged gifts. As he put it, "one cannot predict, foresee, or control through a command-system what happens in a polity any more than one can exonerate society's members from their responsibilities, but one should limit and acknowledge the importance of our shared individual freedoms."[39]

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35. Cf. Rudolf Stárý, "Diskuse," in *Prostor*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-34.

36. Mirolav Petrícek, "O Dejinach a Puvabo a Smutku," in *Pritomnost*, No. VI (June 1992). For an English translation of the same, see *Philosophy Today*, Vol. LVI, No. 4 (Winter 1992), pp. 304-309.

37. Rudolf Stary, "Diskuse," in *Prostor*, *op. cit.*

38. Vaclav Belohradsky, "Levice za vymírání svetlusek," in *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, *op.cit.*; "Levice po stazení sovetské vlajky," in *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, (March 20, 1992), p. 7; "Levice v planetarní dobe," in *Mlada Fronta Dnes*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

39. Jiri Musil, "Czechoslovakia in the Middle of Transition," in *Daedalus*, Vol. CXXI, No. II (Spring 1992), pp. 175-196.

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The Intelligentsia's Responsibility

Now that the Republic has shrunk and its unresolvable differences with its hyphenated sister have been finally set aside, what is the role of the Czech intelligentsia? One thing is certain: they have stopped believing that they control history. Both unrepentent Marxists and opportunistic Klausians appear to have given up previous comforting certitudes. Does this mean that Gordon Hubert Schauer's famous question concerning the status of the Czech nation in 1886[40] has become irrelevant in 1993? Inasmuch as such a question means anything to anyone today, it is reasonable to ask the Czechs about it. For their part, Czech intellectuals are sufficiently challenged by it to keep addressing it in their various periodicals (*Literarní Novini, Mladá Fronta Dnes*, *Pritomnost*, *Ceska Mysl, Prostor*). At any rate, they are not finished because in 1992 they democratically abandoned the government they had helped form in 1990. They did lose their grip on the affairs of state but, as most of the *Prostor* conference participants indicated in April 1991, it was high time they did. Intellectuals make better critics than managers and, as a rule, parliamentarianism is not conducive to a translation of their critical acumen into political practices.

Two main factions seem to be predominant today. The first is close to West European social democracy. Sokol is one of its most articulate exponents, along with ex-politicians such as Pithart and Dienstbier, now that they have left politics. The main problem here is the obsolescence of social-democratic ideas. The second is the Klausian tendency, grounded in the rhetoric if not the substance of neo-liberalism. Its major representatives, Lederer, Prihoda, Znoj and Petricek draw on a very heterogeneous pool of West European ideas. Compound this with their own excavations into their indigenous liberal traditions and the result is a very complex political culture.

Such developments are both promising and disturbing. They are promising insofar as they encourage discussion and enrich cultural life.

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40. Schauer asked: "What is the role of our nation? What is our role in the history of mankind? What is the nature of our national existence? Are we as secure in our own house as we think we are? Are our national reserves so rich that they can provide sufficient moral strength to those who struggle for the nation *in extremis*?" See Gordon Hubert Schauer, "Ceska Otazka," in *Cas* (December 20, 1886), pp. 3-5. Ironically, when asked by Karel Hvizdala in 1985 whether he felt challenged by such a question, Havel denied it. See his *Disturbing the Peace*, trans. by Paul Wilson (New York: A. Knopf, 1985), pp. 178-9. Yet most of his subsequent political speeches as President have in one way or another sought to answer Schauer's questions. See also Havel, *Summer Meditations*, trans. by Paul Wilson (New York: A. Knopf, 1992).

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They are disturbing because the energy generated has not been focused on their own local problems. It is not that the Czech press has not reported on events in Bosnia. The problem is that intellectuals have been surprisingly silent. The present Minister of Foreign Affairs, Josef Zieleniec, recently went out of his way to criticize this cautious silence: "This problem divides all states and nations. . . . This is a classical recipe for a major conflagration which could set a large part of the world on fire. All around Europe intellectuals have taken different positions on this conflict. I am at a loss to understand why ours do not, or how little they have cared to address the issue of nationalist violence and ethnic cleansing."[41]

Czech intellectuals should stop relying on Havel to fulfill that specific responsibility by persistently appealing to his West-European counterparts to match their recognition of the new republics with substantial military and logistical support. If his critics (Fidelius, Belorhadsky, Trestik, Bednar) want to end the combination of politics and morality their President articulates, they will have to elaborate their own ethical positions and start thinking about the fires burning next door.

42. See his address to the students of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University, delivered May 18, 1993.

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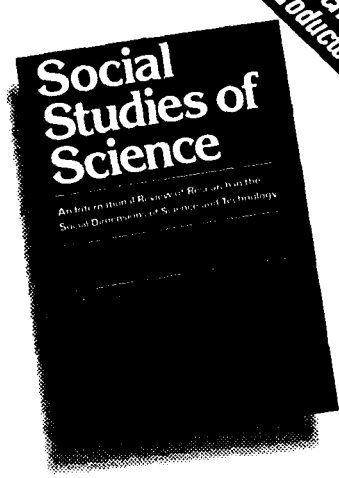

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*The Third Munich**

Karel Kosik

Czechoslovakia has broken down. Yet many Czech commentators are buying, praising, and even reading Ferdinand Peroutka's classic work on the Czechoslovak state.[1] This is unsettling. Was the break-up unavoidable after 1989? Was it a kind of natural catastrophe that could have been avoided? Or was it the result of conscious action?

Three Czech Attitudes Toward Slovaks

§1 Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 as a renewal of the Czech state. "The Czechs have a historical right to an independent state of their own making. Moreover, they have a natural and historic right to be affiliated with Slovakia."[2] In 1918 the Czechs took it for granted that Slovakia would become part of their renewed state: Czechoslovakia. This founding act and the reasoning behind it contains an equivocation never clarified. It is the source of all subsequent complications and of the recent break-up. For most Czech politicians, Slovakia was never a subject of particular concern but rather something "to modernize" and to guide.

§2 It is small tribute to Czech politicians that two catastrophes — 1938 and 1968[3] — did not free them of their stubborn prejudices and lead them to reflect on the common state of Czechs and Slovaks. Even the political representatives

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* This is a modified version of a paper presented at the conference on "Masaryk's Idea of Czechoslovak Statehood in Light of the Critique of History" held in Hodonin, Czechoslovakia in September 1992. Translated by Miloslav Bednar. All notes in the text have been added.

1. Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budovani statu ceskoslovenska politika v letech poprevratovych*, four volumes in five (Prague: Fr. Borovy, 1933-36). A Czech journalist, Ferdinand Peroutka (1895-1978) was a close friend of Thomas G. Masaryk, the founder of the first Czechoslovak republic (1918-1923). He was also editor of the most influential intellectual journal, *Pritomnost*, and a daily newspaper, *Dnesek*. Ultimately a refugee, like many other European intellectuals, he emigrated to the US and worked for Radio Free Europe from 1950 to 1964. He died in Queens, NY.

2. Thomas G. Masaryk, *Novi Evropa* (Prague, 1920), p. 160.

3. Here Kosik refers to the first betrayal of Czechoslovakia to Hitler at the Munich Conference in 1938 and the second betrayal, the Soviet-led invasion of Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, invited by Czech communists loyal to Moscow, which Kosik calls the second Munich. This recent break-up of the state is accordingly the third Munich.

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who rose to power in 1989 did not understand the overriding importance of "the Slovak question" for Czechs. They continued in their old ways and failed to recognize the existence of two historical subjects in one state.

§3 Historical subjects recognize and treat each other as equals. As such, they can propose independent initiatives. In this context, there is no place for relations of teacher and student, speaker and listener, etc.

§4 If the elected Czechoslovak president is a Czech, his first junket should be to Slovakia to deliver his inaugural address. He should appear as a Czechoslovak statesman.

§5 More than in Spring 1968, in November 1989 the "Czech question" was "a universal question, and the practical test of this universality" was the "Slovak question." Nothing was more urgent than to recognize that "Czechs and Slovaks are fraternal nations, but politically they are first and foremost two founding nations with equal rights, two nations which founded a state."

§6 Is there any relation between the collapse of Austria-Hungary at the end of WWI and the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1992? Are these events two stages of the same process? Have the predictions of those who warned about the doom of this "artificial conglomerate" in Central Europe finally come true?

§7 After 1848 Frantisek Polacký proposed both to the nations and to the ruling elites a way to save the Austro-Hungarian Empire by transforming the monarchy into a federation of nations with equal rights, by abolishing the relation of rulers and ruled, by recognizing that human beings are neither hammers nor anvils.[4] The ruling elites rejected this path and when, after losing WWI isolated voices began to articulate it once again, it was too late. The Hapsburgs lost an historical opportunity in Central Europe. Theirs was a completely different situation and a completely new historical opportunity. Masaryk realized this, seized the historical moment and articulated it as a militant alternative: "Either the free Czechoslovak nation or the degenerate Hapsburgs: free Bohemia or reactionary Austria."

§8 The next generation of Czech politicians lacked Masaryk's vision. Unlike Czech politicians who wasted their chances in 1938, 1948, 1968 and

4. Frantisek Palacký (1798-1876) was a Czech historian and politician. He became the first editor of the *Journal of the Bohemian Museum*, which in turn became the most important literary journal of Bohemia. He was the author of the five volumes of *The History of the Bohemian People (1836-1867)*. The 1848 revolution forced Palacký into practical politics. He favored a strong Austrian empire consisting of a federation of southern German and Slav states. The collapse of the federal idea and the triumph of reaction in 1852 led to his retirement from politics.

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1989, the Slovaks took the first opportunity, when pressed neither by Nazi Germany nor Stalinist Russia, to choose not a clergy-controlled fascist state but a democratic republic.[5] Prague "democrats" failed to see this as an act of emancipation, a kind of Slovak analogy to what the Czechs had done in 1918. As a result of their arrogance, they strengthened the forces of reaction.

§9 The sovereign Republic of Slovakia faces threats. Is the Czech Republic also exposed to new threats?

Decay

§10 Palacký and Masaryk justified their political programs philosophically. Political action was anchored in questions such as: "What is man? What is truth? What is history?" By these standards, contemporary politics are in decline.

§11 The clearest manifestation of this decline can be seen in that the old bankrupt ideology has not been replaced by political thinking but by a new ideology. This new government ideology is an eclectic mixture of greedy pragmatism and overblown moralizing. The pragmatists act; the moralists talk. They complement each other. The result is an immoral reality embellished by slogans of love and decency.

§12 The old ideology considered itself (and actually was) fatally wounded when the following question was asked: "What is socialism?" The new ideology will continue to mystify popular consciousness as long as it lacks the courage to ask another question: "What is happening in Czechoslovakia today?

§13 After November 1989 Czechoslovakia became "the most philosophical" state in the world. Everything is "philosophy" and everyone has a "philosophy." There is a "philosophy of exporting weapons," a "philosophy of the Ministry of Finance," a "philosophy of privatization," a "philosophy of prisons," a "philosophy of sex." On July 4, 1991, Frantisek Vondrasek spoke of an "entertaining philosophy" in *Lidovi noviny*. In the same newspaper on March 16, 1991, Vavrousek [the former Czech Minister of the Environment) outlined his "philosophy of the new law on garbage."

§14 One component of the new government ideology is 19th century Social Darwinism, which holds that, "while all people are equal, some are more equal than others. Those who know how to make money are more equal."

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5. Kosik here refers to the period in Slovak history — from October 1938 to March 1939 — when Slovak politicians attempted to revolt against the Munich agreement by breaking with the Czech state and creating an independent Slovakia. This interpretation may be questionable, since the influence of fascist forces in Slovak politics culminated in March 1939 when Father Tiso turned the Slovak state into a Nazi puppet dictatorship.

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§15 Pragmatic and moralizing ideologies usurp the banner of "philosophy" and provide the semblance of "a spiritual eye" which beholds reality. In fact, however, this ideology occludes reality, keeps people in the dark, like a dark cave, so they see nothing. Real philosophy, however, illuminates every cave.

§16 Today political leaders dismiss 1968. They see it as a farce and pretend to play a new game. But during 1968-69 "reformers" lost out because they refused to rely on the people, who were behind them and were ready to demonstrate in the streets. Those "reformers" were more interested in their personal roles than in the matter at hand. Thus they were soon replaced by run-of-the-mill pragmatists, who better understood the ABCs of politics. Organizing and organization are endemic to politics. Thus two well-organized *reactionary* factions — one Czech, grouped around Cechie [the hotel in Prague where they first met], the other Slokav, led by Bisak and Husá — joined in the Spring of 1969 to deal the final blow to the fading "Prague Spring."

§17 In August 1968 Czechoslovak politicians capitulated in Moscow. In so doing they joined the power-structure and condemned the people. They took their place in history as indecisive actors lacking political *imagination*. They sold out the future for the political moment. Can the same be said of those who came to power in November 1989 and quickly forgot they owed their influential positions to popular protest?

§18 Georg Buchner's Danton also believed in the power of his fame and charm, and assumed that none would dare challange him. He was wrong. Danton without power was no longer a leader and the people did not hesitate to dispach him to a bottomless pit.

§19 The declining imagination of Czech politicians is obvious, among other things, in their reasoning, behavioral patterns and clothing. But it favors certain sports (hockey, tennis, golf): Moscow, Bonn, Washington.

§20 On September 30, 1991 the federal prime minister (the Slovak ex-communist, Marian Calfa) endorsed the preservation of a common Czech-Slovak state on the ground that it was cheaper than two divided republics. After that, who had any more doubts about the inevitability of the break-up? Who can measure the distance between Palacký's and Masaryk's idea of the state and this base calculation?

§21 It is the intellectuals' duty to think. If they stop thinking in order to take influential positions and strut before the mass media, they become bad officials and tiresome preachers.

§22 The essence of humanity and of popular government (democracy) is

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the recognition of other human beings as *equally* legitimate, dignified and free. Democracy cannot be defiled by the imprisonment or persecution of political opponents. But it can falter if it fails to deal properly with those who invited foreign troops into their country and for twenty years collaborated with them. Instead, the new democracy only questions their legal or more commercial improprieties (they bought villas at bargain prices and sold property cheaply). Thus, public affairs are reduced to the level of the market, confirming that the country's new masters have the mentality of shop-keepers.

§23 Who forced these functionaries to legislate this travesty of justice, to let the *real* culprits off the hook?[6] A "law" which blurs the distinction between guilt and innocence, between those who aided and abetted crimes and those against whom the crimes were perpetrated demands no proof of guilt and leaves the innocent defenseless? This "law" makes it impossible to seize the perpetrators, those who sneer at the law, as they did in 1968: "August 21, this infamous date [the date of the Soviet invasion], seems to bear out that laughing and trustful people succumbed, as so often before, to a well-organized minority with no sense of humor — a minority obsessed with the will to rule. Thus the guilty conspirators will have the last laugh."

§24 "Democracy is the organization of society on the basis of work; it allows for no group or class to exploit the work of others."[7] Masaryk's statement bears witness that for him, as for Palacký, democracy is not reducible to a well-functioning mechanism but is grounded in human *existence*. It is part of what the Germans call *die Seinsfrage* — the question of Being.

§25 At one time I was extremely critical of Masaryk. But he turned out to be right. His work lives on in discussions and debates in each new generation. The laying of wreaths on his grave is not the main sign of respect.

§26 "We grow, like trees, from the ground up." So wrote Jan Neruda,[8] a true democrat, thus capturing the essence of what Kant called *Enlightenment*.

§27 Democracy will prove its vitality and historical legitimacy when it comes to terms with the objections raised by undemocratic thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger. In this respect, Churchill's often quoted maxim — that democracy is the worst of all possible systems except for all the others — captures the paradox of democracy.

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6. This refers to the law of "lustration," which prosecutes the "little fish" who cooperated with the regime in order to survive, and lets the "big fish" who filled the upper echelons of the communist bureaucracy go free.
7. Masaryk, *Novi Evropa*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
8. Jan Neruda (1834-1891) was a Czech poet, writer, journalist and critic.

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The 20th Century

§28 The common state of Czechs and Slovaks was founded at the beginning of the 20th century, marked by the opening shots in Sarajevo. Its break-up also coincides with the end of the 20th century. Does the history of Czechoslovakia provide an account of this century?

§29 The 20th century ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Empire. We are now already in a *transition* to the next century. Are we entering an era of universal prosperity, as the new ideology promises? Every ideology is lavish with promises, but never knows what it is saying. Ideology equals ignorance. It is an authoritarian claim which reassures itself of its correctness through repetition.

§30 Where are we going? Or, more precisely, where is Europe heading at the turn of the century?

§31 Both Palacký's and Masaryk's political thought is determined by *threats*. Europe is threatened by two fatal dangers concentrated at its center. Central Europe, as a federation of free nations or at least as the common democratic state of Czechs and Slovaks, confronts these dangers from two sides and defends all of Europe.

§32 Palacký justified the necessity of a Central European federation with the same arguments Masaryk used to advocate a common state of Czechs and Slovaks — aggressive Prussianism and Tsarist expansionism. The common state of Czechs and Slovaks was founded when these threats were real. It ceased to exist when these threats disappeared.

§33 Central Europe, including Czechs and Slovaks, lies somewhere in *between* and should remain so. It should not be allowed to become German or Russian territory. It must retain its own distinct character.

§34 Central Europe is the historical site of specific, unrepeatable and irreplaceable events. This site is situated *between* two powers, which from time to time (whenever the opportunity arose) offered protection or annexation (two words for the same thing). First and foremost, however, it is a place where many old languages and cultures interact in growth, synthesis and creation.

§35 Central Europe is the site of cathedrals, symphonies, operas, dramas, humor, won and lost battles, poetry and science, defenestrations, executions, revolts both won and lost.

§36 Central Europe is a privileged historical site. It became acquainted with Nazism and Bolshevism not through literature but directly. This experience is

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invaluable. But neither the intellectuals nor the people have appreciated its real value. Bring this to light and a creative imagination is inspired. All powers originate from the imagination. Where there is no imagination, shows of strength and bullying take its place.

§37 Central Europe's exceptional experience, complete with named and as yet unnamed suffering, is linked with the enigmas of the 20th century — Nazism, Bolshevism and the Munich syndrome. What does it mean to be betrayed, occupied, cheated, humiliated, to hope against hope, to be disgusted but not to despair or become cynical? The essence of this experience is to persevere no matter what. The endurance of evil is defiance without apology. Every resistance is existence which exposes itself to everything, including evil. Culture is a miraculous transformation, something akin to what happens in Handel's "Messiah" ("We shall all be changed"), something able to turn wrath, humiliation, disappointment and the like into something quite other, such as kindness, humor, understanding and sympathy.

§38 Culture is the act of transforming suffering, pain and evil into joy, consolation and relief. Should all this be left to the market, bought and sold by the highest bidder?

§39 Politicians claim that Czechs are going back to Europe. But they do not ask whether Europe still exists. Europe is ancient Greece, Christianity, the Enlightenment, Diderot, Mozart, Kant. This Europe no longer exists. Today it has become part of a planetary complex. An alliance of finance, science, and technology rules "the world" and prepares for the annexation of the universe. While it brings affluence to part of humanity, it devastates the earth and life. Devastation ends in nothingness. This void expands and engulfs human beings.

§40 More shocking than the break-up of the state is a petty, now half-forgotten recent incident when a 16-year-old youth hired two friends the same age to kill his parents. Everyone, including churches and politicians, remained silent and pretended nothing had happened.

§41 We do not enter Europe: we exchange one cave for another. The cave is like a barrack: grey, surrounded by barbed wire. As caves go, it is more than comfortable, lit by advertisements brighter than the stars and the sun.

§42 The new world order does not belong to any existing great power. It is anonymous. It seeks to destroy the world or, in other words, to transform it into a cave. The next world order will be the universal domination of the cave.

§43 Palacký anticipated radical change when he pointed out that the age of "steam and electricity" ushered in a new order of things. This order was

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characterized by the immeasurability of everything. "The world" lost its measure and developed without it.

§44 There is a choice far greater than those available during elections, whether local or parliamentary, by referendum — the existential choice between the cave and the world.

§45 Only by making this existential choice can one ask for God's guidance, thus choosing God, Being, world over *whatever* cave.

§46 It is indicative of this godless time that God is drawn into such petty intrigues, that God is invoked in such banal disputes, that He is recommended as a qualified advisor with respect to which party or individual to elect.

§47 I am not a godless person: I am an atheist. The difference between the two is abysmal. A godless person does not know what "God" means. An atheist does not believe in God. He does not attempt either to prove or deny the existence of God, nor does he discuss who or what is God. Rather, he asks what does "God" mean. An atheist is not indifferent to the fact that the present age has given up on God and deals with him as a fictitious presence. Under such circumstances, even human suffering can become a matter of remuneration.

The Third Munich

§48 After the fall of Nazi Germany and the disintegration of the Soviet empire, Central Europe is no longer endangered from either East or West. *Is anything threatening Europe today*? Yes! Europe is threatened by *nothingness*. This nothingness is the greatest threat of the next century.

§49 Nazism and Bolshevism are part of the past. But one 20th century phenomenon is becoming more prevalent and universal: the Munich Syndrome.

§50 What is the Munich Syndrome? In 1938 it did not occur to the Czechoslovak president that his allies would betray him and give his country to the Nazis. In the spring of 1968 political leaders in Prague did not envision that the country would be invaded and betrayed by "allies." The Munich Syndrome is an evil. It is "politics by ambush."

§51 The threatening evil does not run into any resistance. Its victorious march is facilitated by concessions. Existence (society, state, political leaders, the individual) cannot resist the oncoming evil, capitulates to it, in the hope that something can be saved. The Munich Syndrome is a peculiar coexistence of aggressive evil and myopic defeatism. The main feature of this coexistence is shamelessness. Both aggressors and defeatists loose face. Both unashamedly

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demand sacrifices. Something or somebody must be sacrificed — territory, sovereignty, freedom, coexistence, honor, decency. The very substance of humanity must be sacrificed — existence as resistance, as the struggle against evil. The result is submission to evil: the domination of evil becomes a norm, its acceptance becomes normal, the product of "normalization." The Munich Syndrome thus comprises aggression, defeatism, and shamelessness.

§52 Menacing evil forces the victim into a cave. If one accepts what the predominant evil preaches, i.e., that, despite suspicions to the contrary, the reality of the cave is the only reality, then evil has won. One's soul has been sold to the devil in exchange for a comfortable life. It is no longer possible to distinguish between good and evil; nothingness will have taken over.

§53 At the beginning of the 20th century Jaroslav Hasek[9] understood that one of the most appropriate and dignified responses to the arrogance and narrow-mindedness of the modern cave is *humorous* rather than malevolent *derision*.

§54 In 1852 Karel Havlicek[10] said that God had been executed as a rebel and that he continues to be executed every day. He was sentenced to death because He refused to play the role assigned him by both the elites and the people — to participate in the ridiculous theater of human experience and to care for base human interests.

§55 To abandon the essential to the non-essential is the real meaning of the claim that "God is dead."

§56 During this transition mankind is driven by the obsession to consume and is being swallowed by its own greed. People are so preoccupied with their own comforts that they have no time to consider what is happening. Prisoners of a vulgar materialism, they lose the courage to face reality and thus prefer an ideology of base instincts.

§57 Liquidation was one of the key words of the 20th century — liquidation of Jews, class enemies, etc. Mankind must make sure that the watchword of the next century will not be liquidation of people committed to "openness."

§58 "Not Caesar but Jesus!" Once a misguided critic of Masaryk, I remain faithful to the memory of my companions executed in Terezín. As perhaps an intimate friend of Jan Patocka, I review my errors, losses, disillusions and resolve

9. Jaroslav Hasek (1883-1923), author of *The Good Soldier Schweik*, used satire to demonstrate the disintegration of the Austrian army and opposition to WWI.

10. Karel Havlicek (1821-1856), Czech critic, journalist and poet, became particularly well known after the revolution, when he founded *Narodny Noviny* (National News), which became a leading force among liberals.

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them into a basic decision: Not the cave but "the open." The way to the open is paved with thinking, poetry, doing things one likes. Politics is also committed to the open. Any politics not committed to the open, not guided by its idea, any politics that considers the cave its field of action sooner or later degenerates into a bad routine, into a politics not worthy of the name.

§59 The sterility of the "Right," the "Left" and "above the parties" [Havel's politics, free of party allegiances] today betrays a lack of imagination. It is the politics of the cave which they extol as the only alternative. The parties which struggle within the cave for a place in the sun do so with no remorse, with no inkling of the existence of the open.

§60 The restoration of 19th century capitalism and the invasion of a sophisticated 20th century neocapitalism have been accompanied in Central Europe not only by aggressiveness and shamelessness but also by fatuousness and vagueness: "philosophy." In 1992 the combination of the old and the new has conspired once again to make citizens powerless. Instead of being the serfs of one party, citizens are now the serfs of several parties. They are citizens without citizenship — a powerless source of power.

§61 The basic weakness of what has occurred since November 1989 is that the people's discontent did not turn into a popular movement. It did not transform itself into something permanent that could become the source of political imagination and civic activity. Instead, the people's energies were quickly dispersed and replaced by the particularism of parties. There should be an ongoing *civic forum*, anchored in the constitution — a free space where citizens can debate and negotiate all questions affecting their lives. Such a civic forum is an essential element of modern democracy.

§62 For both Palacký and Masaryk, threats triggered political imagination. Will future threats inspire a *new* political imagination?

§63 A new threat and a new political imagination may stimulate Czechs and Slovaks to find a new way to live together.

§64 Slovak by birth and European by conviction, Dominic Tatarka once spoke of a "Community of God." Recalling the medieval Christian community, he pondered the possibility of a modern equivalent, whether it was possible in modern times to recreate the preconditions for such a community, a poetic harmony — not a weak imitation, but rather a creative analogy of the ancient polis.

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*On Kosik's "The Third Munich"**

Joroslav Opat

What is most bothersome in Kosik's "The Third Munich" is the way he assigns blame for the break-up of Czechoslovakia. He asks whether this was a natural disaster or the result of choice. But he already knows the answer. It is the fault of those he identifies as Czech politicians, whom he accuses of stubborn prejudice, failure to appreciate the significance of the Slovak issue and, above all, exibiting the arrogance of Prague democrats. He assumes that Czechoslovakia could have been saved after November 1989 as a common state of Czechs and Slovaks, but he provides no evidence to show how this could have been done. No such evidence exists. One can only speculate that the common state could have been saved by substantially transforming the state inherited from the communists into a modern democracy.

Two main groups have contributed to the break-up: Czech and Slovak politicians. Kosik implicitly presents Slovak politicians as driven into authoritarianism and nationalism by allegedly arrogant Czech policies. However, Slovak politicians also contributed to the demise of Czechoslovakia. As for Czech politicians, with very few exceptions they never constituted a homogeneous political subject after 1918. Consider Pithart's November 9, 1991 televised address to the Slovaks. The Czech premier thought it necessary to inform his audience at the outset that his was a "purely personal" address. This is symptomatic of the Czech political scene. At any rate, in spite of his disclaimer, Pithart was immediately criticized by some of his ministers. To blame Czech politicians for the break-up of Czechoslovakia is tantamount to ascribing collective responsibility to a coherent group, which as such does not exist.

As for the paternalism of some Czech politicians toward their Slovak counterparts, it may have indeed played into the hands of Slovak authoritarian separatists. Yet more than once after November 1989 unprincipled condescension was in evidence when Czech politicians addressed the question of Slovakia, i.e., the opposite of arrogance. Consider two examples. The first refers to various criticisms of the idea of a single Czechoslovak people in whose name both Czech and Slovak leaders advocated the idea of Czechoslovakia in 1918. It is historically unfounded to present this idea as unfortunate and blame it for the frustration the Slovaks have endured during their coexistence with the Czechs in

* Translated from Czech by Michal Stasa.

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a common state. The idea of a single Czechoslovak people was advocated by the best Czech and Slovak democratic elites. It was on the basis of this idea that a Czecho-Slovak community had been developing long before 1918. This idea can be seen as problematic, but certainly not as politically unfortunate.

The second example is the claim that Czechoslovakism is a stubbornly cultivated ideological expression of the Czechs' attitude toward the Slovaks, which humiliated them and denied them national identity. It can be found in Pithart's above-mentioned address or in Podiven's well-known book on the subject.[1] This claim is simply false. The genesis of the term "Czechoslovakism" indicates that it is a product of ideologies hostile to Czechoslovakia's pre-war democracy. Communist ideologues contributed to this, both before and after WWII. Communist Party ideologues such as Vaclav Kopecky described "Czechoslovakism" as "an imperialist concept, one which privileged the Czechs and humiliated the Slovaks, who were then forced into a nationalist corner with anti-Czech connotations. Of course, it was not the Czech people who were responsible for this concept, but the Czech bourgeoisie, i.e., Masaryk and Benes."[2] In a chapter on "Czechoslovakism and the Czechoslovak Republic," Samo Faltan similarly argued that the purpose of "Czechoslovakism" was to hide power-hungry Czech chauvinism by "denying the existence of the Slovak people, and consequently their right to self-determination and attempting, as the Hungarians had done before, to incorporate the Slovaks into the Czech national community. A major advocate of Czechoslovak national unity'. . . was Thomas G. Masaryk . . ."[3] This book was favorably reviewed by Gustav Husák.

Despite minor differences, the various quoted statements make the same point: they betray an arrogant attitude towards the real democratic values on which Czecho-Slovak relations were based in 1918 and thereafter, thanks to Masaryk! This may be part of the communist legacy.

Lastly, Kosik claims that Central Europe is "first and foremost" an area of coexistence of various cultures. He is right, especially in the 20th century. But it also has been an area of explosive international crises, a hotbed of destructive wars and revolutions. Nationalism, bolshevism and the Munich syndrome have a common origin in arrogance. Linked with power, it becomes a serious threat. It was this kind of arrogance which plunged Europe and the entire world into two world wars. In this context, Kosik's warning against arrogance should be seen as a warning against an ominous evil.

1. *The Czechs in Modern History* (Prague: 1991).
2. Cf. his *The CSR and the CPCz* (Prague: 1960), p. 186.
3. *The Slovak Question in Czechoslovakia* (Bratislava: 1968).

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*The Ideology of Czech Innocence**

Milan Znoj

The Czech state was born on New Year's eve like a phoenix rising from the ashes. The end of Czechoslovakia had been looming in the background as early as the June 1992 elections, when the leading representatives of the two republics, the Czech and the Slovak, reached an agreement concerning the "legitimate end of the federation," i.e., to ensure that the end of the federation take place "intelligently," "in an orderly manner," "without hysteria" and following proper rules. It was not easy to ensure that the end of the Czechoslovak federation would run smoothly, like a kind of chess game in which the Czech side, as it stated at the beginning, had all the major pieces. The legitimacy of the old as well as the new state was not the result of the decency (i.e., the constitutionality) of this transformation but followed from the right to national self-determination. It only meant that the coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks in a joint state had ceased to be acceptable.

In 1990 the Czechs were not in the same predicament as the Slovaks. Their efforts to achieve self-determination were rewarded in 1918 with the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic. The trauma came with the Communist take-over (since the fascist take-over came from outside it was another matter), including the fact that it was not clear it had been a take-over. Slovak self-determination turned out to be more difficult to achieve. In the end, without the Czechs even having noticed, the Communist take-over of the state and unsatisfied national longings were linked subconsciously. The release of energy after the November 1989 revolution was not understood, let alone managed "intelligently."

The Slovaks' uncertain status (as well as that of Germans in Czechoslovakia) was the state's weak point from the very beginning. Of course, the end of the federation does not mean that the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic and thus the break-up of Austria-Hungary had been a mistake. The existence of Czechoslovakia showed that the two nations are closer than the rest of their neighbors and that both depend on mutual cooperation. It was not Thomas Masaryk's wishful thinking to claim that WWI need not have had only destructive consequences, i.e., the collapse of centuries-old monarchies, but that it could pave the way for a democratic Europe. Czechoslovakia accepted the democratic ethos and tied its own existence to that ideal. The fact that subsequently the

* An earlier version of this article originally appeared in the Czech monthly *Přítomnost*, (September 1992), pp. 4-5. Translated by Derek Paton.

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state did not stand the test of other European wars does not prove that Czechoslovakia's existence was a mistake. It is unreasonable to assume that Czechoslovakia alone ought to have rescued Europe from fascism (had Czechoslovakia fought) or Communism (had it not caved in to the Communists). The democratic existence of Czechoslovakia depended on the existence of a democratic Europe.

The irony is that Czechoslovakia has come to an end at the very time when, with the end of Communism, this broken democratic bond could have been renewed. This time, however, Czechoslovakia's demise is its own fault. Yet Masaryk's vision of a democratic Europe, which would give Czech self-determination a positive meaning, does not end with it and can now be linked to the idea of a Czech state. There is only one *raison d'être* for Czech statehood: to contribute to the creation of a democratic Europe. This does not mean that the Czechs will show how Europe ought to be reborn, nor that they should enter trans-Atlantic organizations as quickly as possible. They can, however, contribute to the expansion of Europe and to Central Europe becoming a democratic region. Of course, all this depends on whether the Czechs can develop good relations with the Slovak state.

Why, then, has Czechoslovakia split now, after it survived the trauma of fascism and communism? It may have to do with the inability to manage the social energy released with the ending of communism. The break-up of Czechoslovakia seems to be the result of the fact that on the Czech and Slovak sides irreconcilable ideologies held sway and that politics failed. On the Slovak side, the ideologies were mainly nationalist. One hears remarks such as "the Slovaks were and are a nation subjugated and impoverished by Czechs." At first glance, there seems to be no nationalism on the Czech side. This is not simply the result of the fact that national self-determination is something they take for granted. There is such a thing as Czech nationalism. One of its remarkable masks is the *ideology of Czech innocence*, which played its part in ending the Czechoslovak federation. Central to this ideology is the thesis that "the Slovaks destroyed the federation with their nationalism." It legitimates a shift from supporting the common state to calling for its end. The same people who signed petitions in support of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks rejected any kind of looser structure and, six months later, could demonstrate in favor of an independent Czech Republic and eventually repudiate both positions by supporting Václav Havel, who found himself forced to support the predominant ideology of Czech innocence.

Wounded Pride

The claim that "the Slovaks and their nationalism destroyed the federation" allows Czechs to become condescending: after all, who would want to prevent the "Slovak nation's emancipation"? The ideology of Czech innocence counters the matter-of-fact remark that as "federalists" the Czechs were obviously trying to thwart these efforts by shifting responsibility to the previous political

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leadership, i.e., the legendary negotiators at Papiernika (a small village in Slovakia) who always concluded their meetings with the statement "we have finally reached an agreement," in order to make it suddenly clear that there had to be another round of negotiations in order to reach yet another agreement. Thus the ideology of Czech innocence does not suggest that Czechs might have thwarted the Slovaks but, on the contrary, that they gave in to them and ended up looking like fools. In his *Summer Meditations* Havel also established a link between weakness and a vigorous federalist position when he claimed that in the spring of 1990 he did not expect much from juridical finagling and that the Federal Assembly ought to vote immediately to change the name of the federation from the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to the Czechoslovak Republic, without any hyphen between Czech and Slovak (as suggested by some deputies in the assembly). This was a way to avoid senseless squabbles over the hyphen, the symbol of "authentic federation."

Civic Nationalism

Paradoxically, Czech nationalism was articulated primarily in the idea of universal citizenship and of the unitary state advocated by the Civic Democratic Alliance (Obanská demokratická alliance — ODA). This is why Jan Kalvoda, ODA's deputy chairman, was willing to stomp around the Slovak china shop (despite his reputation as a man capable of walking on water). In fact, ODA's unitarianism best suited wounded Czech pride and was probably responsible for the ODA's receiving at least 5% of the votes — the minimum required for entering parliament. This is why, despite its reputation as an antinationalist party, ODA became a symbol of Czech nationalism. Its uncompromising unitarianism even rejected Havel's promise of "an authentic federation" and refused to accept "a functional federation" proposed by Václav Klaus' Civic Democratic Party (ODS: Obcanská demokraticá strana). Daniel Kroupa (ODA's vice-chairman) could claim that the federation was coming to an end because the 1968 federal constitution contained the "harmful" principle of protection against the majority (a second chamber where both the Czechs and Slovaks had equal representation). According to Kroupa, the real problem was the division of constitutional powers, which allegedly weakened the federation. Similarly, Pavel Bratinka, ODA's chairman at the time, warned against the "federalist character" of the new Czech constitution adopted in December 1992 and rejected the whole idea of federation as "harmful." This fed right into the purely pragmatic arguments of Miroslav Macek, vice-chairman of ODS, who uncompromisingly stated that the federation was a rotten tooth that had to be pulled quickly to stop the toothache.

Slovakia as an Economic Burden

Nationalism and wounded pride were also buttressed by economic motives. According to the Czech Institute for Public Opinion Research in October 1992, 17% of the people in the Czech Republic believed that the division of

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the federation would accelerate economic growth, while 47% claimed it would only lead to a temporary worsening of things. Clearly, Slovakia was perceived as an "economic burden," regardless of the fact that in the Czech Republic the economic outlook is generally brighter than in Slovakia. Obviously, the common perception was that only by unloading the Slovak burden could the Czechs accelerate the successful transformation of a post-Communist society into a capitalist one.

The assumption that "without Slovakia" things would be better for the Czechs was the premise of the ideology of Czech innocence. It did not have to take the crude form of a calculation such as "at least we do not have to keep paying their way." The economic argument actually became one of the main reasons why, after the elections, ODS began calling for the end of the federation and rejected all Slovak offers of looser arrangments. ODS's first commandment was radical economic reform. All other national, constitutional and political issues were subordinated to it.

When, as leader of the ODS delegation, Klaus met with Slovak leader Vladimír Meciar and his Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS: Hnutí za demokratické Slovenko) delegation in Brno, he still may have assumed that he could deal with them. In return for HZDS's acceptance of his model of economic transformation, Klaus promised to overlook Slovak nationalism. Maybe ODS was thinking of proposing that Slovakia play only the Slovak half of the Czechoslovak national anthem and Slovak regiments wear special insignia on their uniforms. Actually, the only issue was a Slovak constitution. The deal was doomed to fail.

Slovakia as a Left-wing Danger

The argument for unloading Slovakia may also be formulated in purely political terms. Such a case was made even before the elections. In his 1991 speech on the anniversary of the violently dispersed demonstration of November 17, 1989, Jan Ruml (then deputy of the Federal Minister of the Interior!) appealed to civil disobedience in favor of federation.[1] Confronted with a "leftist coup" in Slovakia, Ruml saw no alternative than to remain true to the November revolution and save the common state. In doing so, however, he was rejecting the legitimacy of all state institutions, especially Slovak ones, because, except for a few friends, all institutioins failed to see this danger.

After the June 1992 elections, the whole argument was summarized by Václav Benda, the head of the KDS (Christian Democratic Party — also in the coalition).[2] According to him, the election results meant that a choice had to be made between the resurrection of socialism in a common state or democratic development in an independent Czech Republic. Obviously, "none of the actors in the anti-Communist revolution can opt for the first alternative." In order to

1. Cf. *Lidové noviny* (November 11, 1991).
2. Cf. *Lidové noviny* (September 1, 1992).

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emphasize the democratic nature of the argument, Benda pointed out that Slovakia was economically weaker and politically less advanced than the Czech Republic and had a negligible democratic tradition. The implication was that the democratic tradition in the Czech Republic behooves the Czechs to unload the Slovak burden. It was reminiscent of St Matthew's words: "And if the left hand offend thee, cut it off" (in the Gospel, of course, it was the right hand, but some left-wing monk evidently changed the wording while copying the text). The fact that he was also cutting off the hand of Slovak democrats, writing them off and shunting them to the sidelines, remained moot.

The coexistence of two close nations in one state ended with the sound of popping champagne bottles on New Year's eve, 1992. Slovak nationalism blurred the Slovaks' vision, while the ideology of Czech innocence subverted Czech thinking. According to these ideologies, everything was on an inclined plane, being pulled down by gravity (the word "free-fall" was actually used to describe the break-up of the federation). Ideology, however, can rationalize that kind of historical necessity only in hindsight. One question remained unanswered: Was it at all possible to agree on economic transformation and at the same time satisfy Slovak (and Czech) national aspirations? Now that the break-up is history and there are two states, one way or another the Czech and Slovak republics remain the two closest nations in Central Europe, connected at the very least by their most recent history. Politicians should not forget this.

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Solidarity of the Shaken

Ivan Chvatik

From the time they were originally published, Jan Patocka's *Heretical Essays* have generated uneasiness, especially the last dealing with "Wars of the 20th Century and the 20th Century as War."[1] According to Erazim Kohak, *The Heretical Essays* and other texts written between 1972 and 1975 are "the most problematic part of Patocka's life work,"[2] while according to others, as Kohak acknowledges, they are "an embarrassing excess which can be excused only by the stress due to the second occupation [the Soviet occupation of 1968)."[3] Patocka seeks to arouse readers from their "normal" historical understanding, using the interwar experience to undermine the "conviction that the basic level of reality as a whole is simply order, peace, good, and light, sporadically corrupted by spots of chaos, war, evil, and darkness."[4]

According to Patocka, everything is the opposite. Peace is war and day is night. As with Heraclitus, war (or conflict) is the cosmic principle ordering the world, by which some are revealed as gods, others as men, some are made slaves, others free.[5] The principle here does not have the character of unity, of some divine "*hen*," as principle is generally understood. On the contrary, it is the opposite of all unity: conflict. Out of this original conflict Heraclitus sought to create order: the *kosmos*. It does not matter what kind of order this is. The important thing is that it should not be a calm, static and therefore dead state of affairs, but a living, constantly shifting one, because it is produced in an endless conflict — a predicament which could be called "unity." However, there is no such thing in the world.

Under Plato's spell, Judeo-Christian Europe tried to forget Heraclitus and build a New World on a completely different principle, i.e., the idea of monotheism. Notwithstanding the fact that the unifying synthesis has only revealed

1. Jan Patocka, "Wars of the 20th Century and the 20th Century as War," in *Telos* 30 (Winter 1976-77), pp. 116-126. This essay was first published in Czech as a *samizdat* by Kvart & Petlice in Prague, in 1975. It was published "officially" only in 1990 by Academia as *Kacirske eseje o filosofii dejin*, pp. 127-143. All subsequent citations will be from this edition.
2. Cf. Erazim Kohak, *Jan Patocka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).
3. *Ibid*, p. 84.
4. *Ibid*, p. 85.
5. Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1964), Herakleitos, B 53.

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more contradictions, humankind has not given up this principle. Thus reason was never put in its proper place where it applies and is needed. WWI, however, showed that it was impossible to maintain this any longer: "With the war, a general idea began to emerge that there is no such thing as an eternal, objective meaning of the world . . . "[6]

In the post-WWI period, European democratic forces succumbed to the illusion that it was possible to manage the predominant crisis with 19th century ideas — ideas which paved the way for the rise of both Nazism and Bolshevism — and this resulted in another terrible war. After the defeat of Nazism, Bolshevism lasted another fifty years before it collapsed from within. Fifteen years before this collapse, Patocka was inspired by Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn.[7] His idea of the "solidarity of the shaken" is rooted in the difference between these two men. Sakharov, "this hypermodern man"[8] who built nuclear weapons for Stalin, represents one side; Solzhenitsyn, the other. "It is striking that these two men, different in every other respect, speak and act the same. Sakharov exemplifies an entirely post-metaphysical modernity, while Solzhenitsyn is concerned with retaining some continuity with tradition. As a religious man, Solzhenitsyn has a relation to the nation (and nations in general) completely different from Sakharov — a much more traditional attitude, untouched by liberal skepticism. There is something Herderian in him, which has deep theological roots. In spite of all these differences, both men say the same thing. What they share is their concept of sacrifice."[9]

Here Patocka is thinking of the unforgettable experience of the Prague Spring in 1968, when those who had emerged from within the communist regime joined forces with those who had been oppressed by it. Patocka had not as yet formulated his concept of solidarity of the shaken, but spoke about a solidarity able to change the world.[10] To the extent that the technical intelligentsia had all the material power in its hands, it was in a position to prevent misguided politicians and the bureaucratic establishment on both sides of the Iron Curtain from misusing technology to deprive people of freedom.[11] At the time Patocka hoped that the increasingly large intelligentsia "would not become a mass in the sense of becoming passive and lacking initiative . . . They should not lose the inquiring spirit but encourage criticism and critical

6. Patocka, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

7. Jan Patocka, "Hrdinove nasi doby," in *Pece o dusi*, Vol. 6 of *Kacirsky esje o filosofii dejin a texty k charte 77*, Vol. 6 (*Heretical Essays on Phlilosophy of History and Texts Concerning Charter 77*). Samizdat edition, The Archive Collection of Works by Jan Patocka (Praha, 1988), p. 297 ff.

8. Jan Patocka, "Ctyri seminare k problemu Evropy," in *Pece o dusi*, Vol. 3, *O smysl dneska*, Samizdat edition, *The Archive Collection of works by Jan Patocka* (Praha, 1988), Seminar 4, p. 340.

9. *Ibid*, p. 341.

10. Jan Patocka, *Inteligence a opozice*, in *Péce o dusi*, Vol. 3, *op. cit.*

11. *Ibid*, p. 9.

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attitude . . ."[12] In philosophical terms, "once we become aware of the inadequacy of the real world of facticity, it becomes necessary to seek a real spiritual domain. It was Kant who spoke of the spiritual empire . . . as a moral sphere. For him, this sphere was one of reason: a sphere of universality and necessity."[13]

As Patocka soon realized, this outlook was too utopian. It was not clear how this "technical intelligentsia," which hardly suffered, should start thinking politically enough to take on the utopian role he assigned it. From the viewpoint of the *Heretical Essays*, this analysis was developed in terms of the project of seeking an unambiguously good life. But May 1968 did not lead to any profound social change in Europe, and most of the former demonstrators ended up reintegrated in society as it was. After the Soviet occupation, it became clear that the intelligentsia alone could not defeat the communist regime without a clear alternative and ended up adapting to the framework of its opponents. Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov began to popularize this new way of opposing the communist regime from within. Patocka concluded that the communist regime required its opponents to engage themselves totally, "to the bitter end, overcoming every tie, even the tie to life."[14] Here is where the issue of sacrifice arises. But is it, as so often before, just the sacrifice of one's life for an ideal? If so, it would be a mere commonplace. Is there a difference between the sacrifice of a dissident and the self-destruction of a Japanese kamikaze?

Patocka's concept of sacrifice was *not for something* either material or ideal, but *for nothing*, for "self-revelation" as such, since this self-revelation, the Being of things, implies a conflict which demands engagement. This conflict within Being means that things tend also to conceal themselves in the process of manifesting themselves. The structure and conditions of this self-revelation are covered and concealed by what is revealed, "Life in clarity is converted into clear things. The transcendence (from beings to Being, from the revealed things to their self-revelation as such) is lost in favor of what is transcended. Thus life negates itself in living."[15]

It was not easy to adopt Solzhenitsyn's and Sakharov's approaches under conditions of communist oppression and it is unlikely that those who did were driven by Patocka's vision. It is extremely difficult, in relatively peaceful times, to understand whether it is authoritarian to claim to defend moral values in a situation where that kind of action is inappropriate. On the other hand, it is no less difficult to understand that, even in a democracy, there is a danger of fundamentalism and sometimes it can be appropriate to oppose it with total engagement. Very often there is a real danger of totalitarianism in the very attempt to realize a concrete vision of a perfect arrangement of human society based on moral values similar to Patocka's 1968 idea of intellectual opposition but which

12. *Ibid*, p. 13.
13. *Ibid*, p. 20.
14. *Ibid*, p. 314.
15. *Ibid*, p. 315.

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represent a capitulation to the powers that be. In those situations, total engagement may be the only effective way of opposing such dangers. If this offering of one's life is not to be yet another call for the "rule of reason," it must be understood as an extreme way of recovering "conflict," i.e., life. It should never be concerned with any concrete positive outcome but only with the formal possibility of self-revelation, i.e., with the establishment and preservation of an open forum for competing political views. It should be concerned with the preservation of the *agora* of a really functioning democratic regime.

This has not always been clearly understood by the shaken, who for a time lived in solidarity. As has often happened in the history of Europe (and may happen again), the struggle to preserve the possibility to struggle (i.e., to live) can be confused with the struggle for peace, total unity, etc. This can be seen in some contemporary political events, whether hunger strikes or the struggle for an independent Slovakia.

In all political decision-making, everything is at stake, i.e., simply the above-mentioned "nothingness," the possibility of manifestation, the *agora*. Yet this "nothingness" is generally at stake in the process of resolving matters of peace and life, and often both sides in the conflict are in a way right, since both are rational. This rationality, however, is the rationality of finite beings who look at problems from particular viewpoints. For that reason, it is impossible to ultimately reconcile their views, to resolve conflicts once and for all. Those who try to do so in the hope of attaining truth, justice and prosperity, no matter how deep their beliefs, capitulate to totalitarian traps inasmuchas they have yielded to the will to possess and live happily thereafter. To win in the *agora* means, therefore, to defeat opponents but not to destroy them, thus destroying the *agora* itself. The main trait of a functioning democracy is balance — something which should be supported so there will be no more "better tomorrows" in democratic societies.

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Reviews:

Waiting for Meciar

Tim D. Whipple ed., *After the Velvet Revolution: Vaclav Havel and the New Leaders of Czechoslovakia Speak Out* (New York: Freedom House [Focus on issues: no. 14], 1991), 328 pp.

The Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution of November 1989, along with the transformation of East and Central Europe, has been received in the West with more enthusiasm than understanding. It is assumed the enemies of our (former) enemies must be like us, whatever we take ourselves to be. European democratic socialists assumed the members of Charter 77 were democratic socialists;[1] Protestants assumed they were Protestants;[2] and pacifists assumed they were pacifists.[3] Yet this sincerest form of admiration, the projection of one's own views on one's objects of admiration, does a disservice to the dissidents who developed their own philosophy under the harshest conditions. While some Charter 77 members regarded themselves as socialists, Protestants or Catholics, and a few as pacifists, what united them was more than objections to communism.

Major political changes have their philosophical accomplices: the Puritan Revolution — Hobbes; the Glorious Revolution — Locke; the American Revolution — Jefferson, Franklin, and the authors of *The Federalist*; the French Revolution — Voltaire and Rousseau; the Soviet Revolution — Marx and Lenin. However, not since the founding of the US or the USSR has a group of state founders been influenced by philosophy as much as the leaders of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution. A high percentage of Charter 77 signatories and Velvet Revolution leaders were either professional philosophers or had extensive philosophical training. Trying to understand the Velvet Revolution without familiarity with the philosophy behind it is like trying to comprehend the American Revolution without reading *The Federalist*, Benjamin Franklin, or Hobbes and Locke.

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1. John Keane, "Editor's Preface," to Vaclav Havel et al., *Power of the Powerless* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1985), pp. 7-9.
2. Jakub Trojan, "Democracy and its Spiritual Foundation," in *East European Reporter*, Vol. 4, No. 3.
3. R. Paul Churchill, "Vaclav Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* and the Philosophy of Nonviolence," in Duane L. Cady and Richard Werner, eds., *Just War, Nonviolence and Nuclear Deterrence: Philosophers on War and Peace* (Wakefield, NH: Longwood Academic, 1991), pp. 97-108.

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After the Velvet Revolution is a collection of interviews, articles, and speeches by the first post-Velvet Revolution generation of Czech and Slovak leaders, dating from November 1989 to the first democratic election in June 1990. The second generation lasted from the June 1990 to the June 1992 election. The third generation lasted from the June 1992 elections to the disintegration of the Czecho-Slovak federation on January 1, 1993; and it is likely that a fourth generation is growing now, following the Velvet Divorce. Of the fifteen contributors to the anthology, only five are still politically significant: Havel (first Czech president), Klaus (Czech prime minister), Benda (prominent Christian-Democrat member of the ruling Czech coalition), Bratinka (deputy foreign minister), and Mohorita (in the Czech Communist party). Two (Dubcek and Simecka) have made the great leap into really existing socialism to meet Karl Marx; the rest are in universities, the media or on the side-lines. Except for the communist leader, all 14 are intellectuals with degrees in philosophy, sociology, law, and economics. Eight of them signed Charter 77. From the present viewpoint this anthology resembles Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. None of the Slovak contributors have survived politically, and Meciar is not mentioned even once, nor is the possibility of the renewed nationalism that spawned Meciar taken seriously.

The Czech Civic Forum and Slovak Public Against Violence members who contributed to this anthology may be divided into three groups: *existential Center*, *conservative Left*, and *radical Right*. The existential Center (Havel, Dienstbier, Pithart, Butora, Kusy, Gál) sought to preserve the Charter 77 dissident tradition of nonpolitical politics directed by morality and the philosophy of Jan Patocka. The conservative Left (Dubcek, Battek, Urban) attempted to moderate the free market reforms and keep some of the social welfare policies inherited from the communists. The radical Right (Klaus, Benda, Bratinka) has been attempting to transform Czechoslovakia as fast as possible by reducing significantly the intervention of the state in society, as well as the welfare system.

The most significant Havel contribution to the anthology is the by now classic February 21, 1990 address to the joint session of Congress in Washington. In this speech Havel called for an existential revolution — a change in human consciousness. If the deterioration in human history that began with the Renaissance is not reversed, then the self-destruction of Europe in the 20th century will be repeated on a global scale: "Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our Being as humans, and the catastrophe toward which this world is headed, be it ecological, social, demographic or a general breakdown of civilization, will be unavoidable. If we are no longer threatened by a world war, or by the danger that the absurd mountains of accumulated nuclear weapons might blow up the world, this does not mean that we have definitely won. We are in fact far from the final victory." Heidegger also called for such a revolution. Yet he argued that nothing can be done to change "the history of Being." This existential revolution means a community based on Patocka's

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"care for the soul," dedicated to search for transcendental truth and morality, beyond any particularism. For Patocka, the model for such a community was an ideal Holy Roman Empire. Havel reiterates Patocka's arguments, but refrains from any explicit reference to the Middle Ages or the Holy Roman Empire. He only hints that currently we are receding from a model of a just community: "We are still a long way from that 'family of man'; in fact, we seem to be receding from the ideal rather than drawing closer to it. Interests of all kinds: personal, selfish, state, national, group and, if you like, company interests still considerably outweigh genuinely common and global interests."

Following Heidegger, the real culprit for the deterioration in the human condition, for alienation and inauthenticity, is humanism, "We are still under the sway of the destructive and vain belief that man is the pinnacle of creation, and not just a part of it, and that therefore everything is permitted. There are still many who say they are concerned not for themselves, but for the cause, while they are demonstrably out for themselves and not for the cause at all. We are still destroying the planet that was entrusted to us, and its environment. We still close our eyes to the growing social, ethnic and cultural conflicts in the world." Havel argues that the outcome is moral nihilism.

Yet there is a *non-sequitur* here. History proves the contrary to what Heidegger, Dostoyevsky, and Solzhenitsyn claim: it is rather belief in non-human metaphysical entities such as "history," "the spirit of the nation/class," "the master race," and "the only God of vengeance/hosts" that leads to moral nihilism or particularism. Perhaps the evils of our time which Havel refers to are based on an egoistic or egocentric lack of morality, but egoism is not identical with humanism, as Havel seems to assume. To top it all off, Havel blames the ultimate Heideggerian culprit, technology, for the evils of the world: "From time to time we say that the anonymous megamachinery we have created for ourselves no longer serves us, but rather enslaves us, yet we still fail to do anything about it." As a Heideggerian, "the megamachinery" is a metaphysics that makes us perceive Being and ourselves as a raw material. We cannot control this metaphysical power that enslaves and makes us into raw materials. The only remedy for Patocka and Havel, as already stated in Charter 77, is absolute and transcendental morality: ". . . we still don't know how to put morality ahead of politics, science and economics. We are still incapable of understanding that the only backbone of all our actions — if they are to be moral — is responsibility. Responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my company, my success. Responsibility to the order of Being, where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged. The interpreter or mediator between us and this higher authority is what is traditionally referred to as human conscience." This segment of Havel's speech corresponds with Patocka's Charter 77 declaration: "If human development is to match the possibilities of technological instrumental reason, if a progress of knowledge is to be possible, humankind needs to be convinced of the unconditional validity of principles which are in that sense, 'sacred,'

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valid for all humans and at all times, and capable of setting out humanity's goals. We need, in other words, something that in its very essence is not technological, something that is not merely instrumental: we need a morality that is not merely tactical and situational but absolute. . . . No society, no matter how well-equipped it may be technologically, can function without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend on convenience, circumstances, or expected advantage. Yet the point of morality is to assure not the functioning of a society but the humanity of humans. Humans do not invent morality arbitrarily to suit their needs, wishes, inclinations, and aspirations. Quite the contrary, it is morality that defines what being human means."[4]

Havel's responsibility to the transcendental order of Being, carried through the mediation of the call of conscience, is Heideggerian. Following Heidegger, Havel conceives the level of "Being" as the most basic and important one: it represents human conscience and consciousness. Like Heidegger, Havel assigns the role of returning humanity to its authentic self to conscience. *Dasein* — the here and now — has a potential for Being, but after losing itself it has to be shown its possible authenticity. The showing is done by "the call of conscience" to return to the true self.[5]

While Havel had said as much before, the new element in his speech to Congress is his perception of his vocation as President in listening to this call of conscience and sounding it in politics: "If I subordinate my political behavior to this imperative mediated to me by my conscience, I cannot go far wrong. If on the contrary I were not guided by this voice, not even 10 presidential schools with 2000 of the best political scientists in the world could help me. This is why I ultimately decided — after resisting for a long time — to accept the burden of political responsibility."

Havel perceives the role of the intellectual in politics as an intermediary consciousness between this call of conscience and social being. The responsibility of the intellectual for the world, the hope of this world, is to represent human conscience.[6] He has a theory of "trickle down conscience" that runs something like: Being — Conscience — Consciousness of the philosopher-politician — Authentic social being. Havel perceives his (the philosopher's) role in politics as representing conscience in society, leading it back to authenticity. Still, it is not clear what is the content of that authenticity or how Havel the politician can be any more effective in leading the way to authenticity than Havel the dissident. How to lead (in the pedagogical sense of the word) humanity to

4. Jan Patocka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," in Erazim Kohak, *Jan Patocka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), pp. 340-341.

5. For Heidegger, unlike Havel, conscience has no moral implication in the usual meaning of the term, it rather reveals *Dasein*'s temporality and leads to anticipation and resoluteness in the face of death.

6. Havel and the Dalai Lama agreed on this point in their joint declaration that reads like a summary of the philosophical part of Havel's speech before the US Congress. "A Joint Appeal by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and President Vaclav Havel (February 4, 1990)," in *East European Reporter*, Vol 4, No. 2.

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authenticity is one of the most difficult problems in phenomenology and existentialism. Heidegger claimed that there is no answer and we can only hope. Patocka discovered sacrifice as a possible means for authenticity. Havel can help destroy the negative, alienating elements: dismantle the alienating communist system and deconstruct its ideology. Positively, he can tell the truth and inspire his fellow citizens to behave according to his absolute system of values. Still, all these measures have little to do with Havel's political position. After the Velvet Revolution, any democratically elected government would have dismantled the old regime and its ideology. Havel's role as "the conscience of the nation" has nothing to do with actual political power. It only means that Havel can use the presidency as a platform to ensure that the media and the people pay more attention to what he has to say than to what other people have to say, and even then, only if they understand him.

Havel ended his speech to the joint session of Congress by expressing the hope that "you Americans should understand this way of thinking," because the founding fathers of the US, the authors of the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution, were also intellectuals. In reality, however, as far as the understanding of the American Congress and media is concerned, Havel could as well have spoken in Tibetan. According to *The Washington Post*, few if any of the cheering delegates had the faintest idea about what they were cheering. In a sardonic editorial the following day, the paper traced Havel's dictum "Consciousness precedes Being" to Hegel (though the actual meaning of the terms is Marxian rather than Hegelian), and ridiculed the members of Congress for their lack of philosophical erudition. ". . . when Czechoslovakia's new president, Vaclav Havel, addressed a joint session of Congress . . . for a while things seemed to be going along as you would expect: frequent hearty bursts of applause for the intellectual politician who had gone to jail for his principles and had finally prevailed over the repressive system. Then this surreal thing happened. Having warned his happy howling audience that he was about to turn from politics to philosophy, President Havel, who isn't kidding about this stuff, said as follows: 'The . . . experience I am talking about has given me one great certainty: Consciousness precedes Being . . .' Whereas a thunderous burst of applause and a great outcry of agreement went up from your legislators. Yes, your legislators. What, we found ourselves wondering, did they think they have heard? 'Let's stick it to the Japanese?' 'No one should get welfare who refuses to take an available job — and I mean *any* job'?"[7] Next, *The Washington Post* proves its Socratic wisdom by claiming not to be very skilled in philosophy, though it quotes all the entries for "Being" in the index of Havel's *Letters to Olga*, and describes them as "impressive and humbling," and the entries for "Consciousness" as not exactly "a piece of cake either." Then the editorial returns to the members of Congress: "It is, of course, possible that these things are and were well understood by their roaring

7. "Let's Hear it for Hegel," in *The Washington Post* (Feb. 23, 1992), p. A23.

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supporters on the Hill the other day. But it is also at least conceivable that they were not and that the legislators heard something else. But what? One of their number suggests to us that the trigger was in fact the clause that came after. 'Consciousness precedes Being,' Mr. Havel said, and then: 'and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim.' Under this interpretation, Mr. Havel's audience, having for the most part not the vaguest idea what he was talking about, *could* tell who was on the other side and thus were simply saying 'Take that, Karl, you old fool!' On the other hand, a more imaginative person we asked said he thought the legislators might well have thought the formulation had something to do with the abortion debate and was an endorsement of their own pro-life position. . . ."

Although *The Washington Post* did not go on to examine the important Heideggerian meaning of Havel's speech, its admission of lack of understanding puts it way ahead of the rest of the American media. Examining the interpretations of Havel's speech before the joint session of Congress makes a fascinating study in inter-cultural hermeneutics. Letters to the editor of *The Washington Post* on March 3, 1990 suggested several such interpretations. A reader named Edgar Beigel suggested that "It is not difficult to understand Congress's reaction to Vaclav Havel's 'Consciousness precedes Being' if one realizes that most of our legislators already knew about residents of Prague from the sensational film 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being.' Havel's remark conjured up the delectable sights offered by the movie. The legislators could only react to the trigger word 'Being' with shouts of delight and approval in their mental recall of that bare skin." Another reader, John W. Merline, had a more political interpretation: "heard it on good authority that what Congress thought it heard when President Vaclav Havel said 'Consciousness precedes Being' was 'Confucius precedes Beijing.' Now, why they would applaud this statement is confusing. Some legislators, it is believed, felt that this statement was an indication of Havel's support for President Bush's position toward China. Others found it a condemnation of the brutal repression of dissidents. Still others, grasping the subtle philosophical dimension, recognized 'Confucius precedes Beijing' as meaning that the spirit of China transcends the temporal existence of Marxist dogma." Still, the best interpretation was that of William DeFotis: "Congress was obviously itching to break for lunch when it applauded so heartily upon hearing Vaclav Havel proclaim that 'nacho chips precede beans'."[8]

On the Slovak side, Miroslav Kusy, a Charter 77 member and pre-August 1968 head of the ideology department of the Slovak Communist Party, defends Havel's Charter 77 ideals. He objects to the resurgence of totalitarianism in the guise of nationalist mythology that is even worse than the old communist one. Kusy perceived the intolerant misinterpretation of human rights as purely

8. For a more extensive analysis of Havel's speech, see Aviezer Tucker, "Havel's Heideggerianism," in *Telos* 85 (Fall 1990).

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personal, as *my* right for speech to the exclusion of others, branded as "enemies" and "traitors" by nationalists, as the greatest danger to the nascent Slovak democracy. He supported Havel's idea of nonpolitical politics, differentiating between politics as a profession and politics as administration of public affairs. The first kind regards power as an end in itself, fitted in an ideological framework that becomes a taboo, like racism, nationalism, and socialism. Such an ideological system presents race, nation, or socialism as the ultimate value and goal in the name of which all is justified. In contrast, politics in the service of morality and the community has been practiced by the dissidents and Havel. Kusy hoped that the Charter 77 attitude toward politics that springs out of morality would prevail in Czechoslovakia.

The respective fates of Havel and Kusy in the Czech Republic and Slovakia symbolize the destiny of their vision. Havel will become the first Czech president and is enormously respected by the Czech public. Yet he has neither real political power nor any prospects for getting it in the future. Havel's Charter 77 intellectual friends from the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) lost the June 1992 elections. Petr Pithart, who was Prime Minister, is now a senior research fellow at the Prague Central European University. Jiri Dienstbier, who was Foreign Minister and still leads the Civic Democratic Alliance, was last seen sitting next to Olga and Vaclav Havel behind the back benchers of the Czech parliament listening to Vaclav Klaus delivering his speech at the January 1, 1993 special session of the Czech parliament at the Prague castle that formalized the split. Before that, on November 1992, Charter 77 disbanded, finding no special role for itself in the post-communist world. Kusy is fast becoming one of the leading dissidents and human rights activists in the new Slovakia. He is the rector of a new university in the Slovak town of Trnava (north-east of Bratislava). The creation of the Trnava University and Kusy's nomination were decided by the old federal government. Meciar's government is not enthusiastic about either Kusy's moral philosophy or the federal idea behind the university and objects to its creation by withholding accreditation and state support. So far, Kusy is operating the university with the help of the teaching staff and the students in defiance of the Slovak regime and it is not clear how the conflict will be resolved.

Havel and the dissident's philosophy carried within it the seeds of its own political destruction. As dissidents, Havel, and others (e.g., Patocka's student Belohradsky) perceived every political party as automatically destroying personal responsibility. They perceived all political parties as resembling the Communist Party. Hence parties should not participate directly in politics because they are bound to become bureaucratic, corrupt and undemocratic. Their vague alternative was a "non-political-politics" which can be interpreted in many ways. Havel wished unaffiliated individuals to replace political parties as election candidates, to preserve the responsibility of public officials from creeping totalitarianism. Instead of parties, he wanted independent clubs or associations of free individuals for a specific cause, like the associations of dissidents. Non-political politics

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was a good cover for unaffiliated dissidents with different values, political views, and backgrounds whose only common denominator was their objection to communist totalitarianism. However, under democratic conditions Havel's positive alternative to multi-party parliamentary democracy abstracts one aspect of what he terms "politics without politicians," a relative increase of responsibility, from its other aspects — inability to lead a determined, directed, government or opposition policy, lack of political organization to protect the interests of minorities, lack of predictability in political decisions.

It had been predictable that politics without politicians would not work even before it actually failed,[9] with the dissolution of Civic Forum into normal Western-style parties after Czechoslovakia's first democratic elections in June 1990. Havel's personal insistence on not being a member of a party led to his relative political impotence. Without a political party to represent him in the federal parliament, he has been unable to influence the decisions of the legislative body and the policy of the government. When the presidents of the US or France wish to pass legislation, they have assured support from their parties in the legislative bodies and representatives in those bodies (and even that is at times insufficient to overcome parliamentary gridlock). Havel's legislative suggestions can and have been rejected off hand. He pushed for a presidential regime without accepting the means of presidential democracy.[10]

Without Havel's leadership, the Civic Movement, the political party whose policy is most similar to Havel's and whose members are Havel's old dissident-friends, suffered total defeat in the June 6 1992 elections. These elections and the resignation of Havel and his aides in the presidential Hradcany Castle completed a process of "de-dissidentization" of Czech politics. One by one, the dissidents who carried on the struggle against communism since 1968 and who lead the 1989 Velvet Revolution have been pushed out of political life. Without political allies, Havel had no direct influence over the future constitution of the Czech Republic that determined his limited future responsibilities, most significantly, the clause in the constitution that assigns the election of the Czech president to the parliament rather than directly to the the people as Havel wished, i.e., Havel is dependent on the ruling Czech coalition for his power rather than on the people. Havel's philosophy proved detrimental to the possibility of its realization through political means. He shot himself in the foot. He is now politically impotent, tending toward quixotic moral gestures

9. In Summer 1990, I wrote that: "Since the creation of political parties is a universal phenomenon in free societies, it is reasonable to assume that such parties will spring up in Czechoslovakia as well. In such a situation Havel and his supporters will have to choose between discarding their vision of an existential revolution in politics or abolish the right of free association." Avlezei Tucker, "Vaclav Havel's Heideggerianism," *op. cit.*, p. 76.

10. In Summer 1990, I predicted that if Civic Forum split the political parties "may either keep Havel as a figurehead without real power, or abandon him as the leader of a small Green party. The least likely scenario is that Havel will suceeed in implementing his reactionary policies, . . ." *Ibid*, p. 78. The first option has turned out to be correct.

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that have no political significance. A couple of recent examples: on a visit to Germany Havel said he wanted the Czech government to recognize that the expulsion of Sudeten Germans in 1946 was unjust and mistaken. Prime Minister Klaus responded by saying that the Czech government would do nothing of the sort for fear of upsetting property rights in north Bohemia.

More recently, Havel announced his support of Czech military intervention in Bosnia. Klaus and the Defense Minister rebuffed him, claiming that the Czech military is incapable. Only Serbs took Havel seriously, and with typical political savvy sent a four men assassination team to kill him (they were caught). Still, some people in Prague, such as Karel Kosik, did not learn the lesson and assume that all politicians are necessarily corrupt, just as all entrepreneurs are crooks. Instead, they look with romantic nostalgia at Civic Forum and the ideals of the Velvet Revolution that seemed realistic only as long as it was impossible to attempt to implement them, without realizing they were just ideals, admirable, guiding, worth studying, offering substantial criticisms of the Western models, but not necessarily a practical alternative. In today's Czechoslovakia one can be in or out but never above politics. By trying to be above politics, Havel has thrown himself out of it.

Non-political politics is only one example of the Havel-type dissidents' difficulties in adjusting to post-1989 conditions. Karl Jaspers, following Max Weber, differentiated between an "ethics of moral conviction," and an "ethics of social responsibility." The practitioner of an ethics of moral conviction does not evaluate his actions morally according to their consequences, nor does he take responsibility for the consequences of his actions. The practitioner of an ethics of social responsibility takes responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of actions and demands that others do the same. When it comes to politics, the ethics of social responsibility is far superior, in Jaspers's view, because: "When the practitioner of the ethics of moral conviction wants to act, he founders because he must disavow altogether the justification of the means by the end. Since political action is bound to the specific means of force, he must be consistent and reject all action that makes use of this morally dangerous means."[11]

Yet intellectuals have a natural tendency toward an ethics of conviction: ". . . the intellectual, the involved generalist, in contrast to the specialized and neutral expert, always opts for the ethics of conviction over the ethics of responsibility. It is choosing this ethics of conviction that for many people symbolizes 'courage' and 'generosity' compared to the presumed cynicism of the ethics of responsibility — which is why 'it's better to be wrong with Sartre than right with Raymond Aron' . . . ."[12]

As a dissident, Vaclav Havel and his fellow dissidents had neither the chance

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11. Edith Erlich et al., *Karl Jaspers: Basic Philosophical Writings* (from "Die Atombombe und die Zukunft des Menschen"), trans. by E. B. Ashton, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986), p. 418.

12. Luc Ferry & Alain Renaut, *Heidegger and Modernity*, trans. by Franklin Philip, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 10.

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nor the need to practice the ethics of social responsibility. With no political power, Havel could not use political force for his ends. He was responsible only for himself, and the consequences of his actions hardly changed the lives of most Czechoslovaks. As a dissident Havel attempted to preserve his individual authenticity, his "life in truth." As a president with political power, there is a sudden need to differentiate means from ends and practice a consequentialist ethics (the view that the correctness of moral conduct is judged in terms of its results) of social responsibility.

As a Heideggerian, Havel regards the political crisis that led him to power as based on a deeper crisis in the history of Being. In his 1990 New Year's speech, Havel blames the identification of Being and men with production tools and forces on the conmunist regime: "The previous regime, armed with its arrogant and intolerant ideology, denigrated man into a production force and nature into a production tool. In this way it attacked their very essence and the relationship between them. It made talented people who were capable of managing their own affairs . . . into cogs in some kind of monstrous, ramshackle, smelly machine whose purpose no one can understand. It can do nothing more than slowly but surely wear itself down, along with all the cogs in it."[13]

This mechanization of man leads to loss of moral responsibility, as described in Havel's 1978 essay "The Power of the Powerless."[14] Following Heidegger's discussion of "everydayness" in *Being and Time*, Havel claims that in modern society no one can be singled out for blame, while everybody is obliged to search his own soul and confront those aspects of his personality that led him to cooperate with a system that victimized him and forced him to "live in a lie," to deny true and authentic moral identity. "When I talk about a decayed moral environment . . . I mean all of us, because all of us have become accustomed to the totalitarian system, accepted it as an inalterable fact and thereby kept it running. In other words, all of us are responsible, each to a different degree, for keeping the totalitarian machine running. None of us is merely a victim of it, because all of us helped to create it together. Why do I mention this? It would be very unwise to see the sad legacy of the past 40 years as something alien, handed down to us by some distant relatives. On the contrary, we must accept this legacy as something which we have brought upon ourselves. If we can accept this, then we will understand that it is up to all of us to do something about it. *We cannot lay all the blame on those who ruled us before*, not only because this would not be true but also because it would detract from the responsibility each of us now faces — the responsibility to act on our own initiative, freely, sensibly and quickly . . . ."[15] The important practical implication of

13. Vaclav Havel, "New Year's Address," in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, edited and trans. by Paul Wilson, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 391.

14. Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-214.

15. Vaclav Havel, "New Year's Address," in *Open Letters: Selected Writings 1965-1990*, *op. cit.*, p. 391. Emphasis added.

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this analysis is that those who cooperated with the communist authorities in Czechoslovakia should not be held responsible for their actions, should not be prosecuted, since everybody in Czechoslovakia is equally responsible for the loss of responsibility under totalitarianism.

Yet liberated Czechoslovakians, like liberated nations the world over, seek vengeance against those who cooperated with the occupation authorities. In the case of the quislings who ran Czechoslovakia for the Soviets publicly, it is easy to determine their guilt. But most of the informers cooperated clandestinely, and since they do not admit their relation with the communist security services the only evidence for their cooperation is the secret files left by the former regime. These files are less than reliable, since they can be forged or may record false information when communist operatives may have "invented" agents.[16] Still, the Czechoslovak government passed a law of "lustration," according to which those mentioned in the secret files cannot fill a government job for five years. Then a newspaper published the complete leaked list of informants by the thousands. The accused in many cases, as in Kafka's novel, can neither confront their accusers nor know the secret evidence against them.

For Havel, the people who cooperated with the communist authorities were alienated and alienating at the same time, and hence cannot be held responsible for their pre-Velvet Revolution actions. Even without Havel's Heideggerian view, from a moral-legal viewpoint it is impossible to observe "due process" in judgments based on secret files where the accused can neither confront their accusers nor examine the evidence. As president, one of Havel's functions has been to sign all bills into effect. Despite his objection to the law of lustration he did sign it, while protesting and admitting that even he is mentioned in the files of the secret police as a candidate (the lowest rank in the echelon of cooperation) and having lunch publicly with Jan Kavan, a prominent "lustrated." In a lecture he gave at New York University, Havel attempted to excuse his behavior: Had he not signed the bill, it would have gone into effect anyway, and he would have thrown his country into a destabilizing political crisis. "It would have been a typically dissident-like, morally clean yet immensely risky act of civil disobedience." Havel finally expressed doubts about his decision, concluding that "history" will be the judge of the consequences of his action.

It is hard to accept Havel's consequentialist calculation. The late Dubcek, the former reform-communist leader of the Prague Spring, as speaker of the federal parliament, refused to sign this bill of lustration, and no major constitutional crisis ensued. Yet it is interesting to note, on the one hand, the ethical shift from the Kantian ethics of conviction of Havel the dissident to the

16. See Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana*, where a shy British vacuum-cleaner salesman in pre-communist Havana is asked by the British secret service to recruit Cuban agents. Since he is too shy to actually recruit anybody, he invents agents out of the membership list of an exclusive Havana country-club. Then, to his horror, his assumed agents are murdered one by one as his fiction becomes reality.

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consequentialist ethics of responsibility of Havel the president, and on the other, the inexperienced practice of ethics of social rerponsibility by Havel. As a dissident, Havel was committed to do the right thing irrespective of the circumstances or the consequences. Havel the president changed his philosophy and hoped that the consequences of signing the unjust bill would be better than those of not signing it. Without power, responsibility can be only for one's self and, depending on one's metaphysics, for what Havel described as "the order of Being." Both are aspects of responsibility for authenticity since the ontology that assumes the independent existence of "an order of Being" also assumes that authentic *Dasein* has a special relation with this order of Being, a special responsibility, and that the relationship is part of the essence of man. Authenticity cannot be subjected to consequentialist computations. "I am less authentic today, so 'I' shall be able to be more authentic tomorrow," in contrast to "I prefer to be less happy today so I can be happier tomorrow," is a self-contradictory expression, similar to "I die today so I shall arise from the dead a better person tomorrow." Happiness is a contingent characteristic of man; his essence is not. If I decide to be less authentic, there will be no "later." It is impossible to make consequentialist computations about essences. The moment one gives up one's authenticity, one's essence, one is gone. In contrast, once one has power to assume responsibility for others, one can, indeed must, compute contingencies as Havel did in weighing the injustice to the victims of lustration against constitutional crisis and perhaps a danger to the nascent Czechoslovak democracy. Now, as impotent president, without actual responsibility, Havel can and does return to the ethics of conviction.

Most ordinary Czechs regard the splitting of the Czech and Slovak federation as Havel's and the dissidents' greatest failure. Havel's universal and European concerns and mentality have been in conflict with the burgeoning nationalism in East Europe in general, and Slovakia in particular. Still, Havel has a deeper understanding of nationalism than many Western analysts who attempt to reduce to or rationalize it in economic interests. It is imputed to the Slovaks that they wished to end the Czechoslovak federation to improve their economic lot, or to increase their arms sales unchecked by the Prague authorities. Then it is argued back that in reality the Czech lands have been subsidizing Slovakia, and that in the present saturated international weapons markets, they will never be able to restore their weapons export to its pre-1989 level. Havel understands that Marxist rationalizing reduction of nationalism to economics does not work. Nationalism is an attempt to resolve a modern identity crisis. Accordingly, Havel attempted to accomodate a nationalist and a civil identity as not necessarily identical or mutually exclusive[17]. Unfortunately for Havel, the nationalist approach to the problem of personal identity excludes all others, everywhere. The Swiss model, often cited as a possible option for Czechoslovakia, was created 500 years before German intellectuals such as

17. He did so in *Summer Meditations*. See my review in *Telos* 91, pp. 179-184.

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Fichte and Schlegel invented modern nationalism. Since then, nationalism has excluded all other identities. Nothing Havel or any other political force could have done would have changed this deep identity crisis or its separatist outcome. The velvet veil had to be torn.

The Slovaks' animus towards Havel may be the outcome of the latter's confrontation with exclusionist nationalism on its own level, rather than the attempt to reduce or rationalize it. The identity crisis that breeds nationalism is so deep that it does not allow any doubts or competition with the one and only, all encompassing answer. The suggestion of a complex identity structure, of more than one answer, restores the original painful crisis that ought to be avoided at all costs. Havel's universalist schemes seems to provide precisely this sort of threat.

The mistake of intellectuals such as Kosik is based on a rationalized guilt complex. In reality, nationalism is more desperate than rational[18]. Attempts to deal with nationalists on a rational level are doomed to fail. West European nations have shown it is possible to grow out of nationalism and find more sophisticated solutions to the identity crisis. When Slovakia (and the other nations of East Europe) outgrow nationalism it may be possible to reason that a command economy in Slovakia cannot be more successful than elsewhere, that in the framework of a unifying Europe and especially between the unstable former Soviet Union and "nostalgic" Germany it is wiser to be a part of a greater political unity, and that between total domination from Prague and absolute independence there are many federal and confederal possibilities. Right now, the nationalist Slovaks and the thoroughly non-nationalist Czechs (even in West European terms) can hardly communicate, let alone reason with each other. The *existential center* can be blamed for many mistakes. The splitting of Czechoslovakia is not one of them.

Compared with the Czech *radical Right* and the Havel Pithart-Dienstbier *existentialist center*, the Left lacks vision. One of the many caricatures from the Czechoslovak press that stud this anthology (together with an excellent introduction to political developments from November 1989 to June 1990) shows a naked fat middle-aged woman facing a bewildered man saying "What do you mean, you don't recognize me?! I'm your dream of 1968!" Before his recent death, Dubcek was more a symbol than a political reality. In his segment of the anthology, most of the space is devoted to his defense of his actions following the 1968 Soviet invasion. Why did he not order the military to resist? Why did he cooperate with the Soviets until his dismissal in 1969? When asked about his vision for a New Left, he reiterates the Charter 77-inspired

18. The Slovaks celebrated their declaration of sovereignty by practicing the old *particularly Slovak* custom of offering bread and salt to strangers. This allegedly "Slovak" custom is shared by a dozen other nations around the world and originates in *Genesis*, where Melchizedek, the Canaanite king of Jerusalem, offered bread and salt to Abraham. But nationalists will pick anything to fill their identity void.

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principles of human rights (although he did not sign the document): respect of the individual, tolerance, right to a decent life, even rights of property. He also stresses the difference between social democracy and discredited communism. He mentioned the possibility of the Left merging with the Green parties or with New Youth movements, but had no clear Left vision to offer for the 1990s. Rudolf Battek of the Social Democratic Party has nothing positive to offer either. Jan Urban who was Civic Forum's chief of staff and is now out of politics, perceived one possible new role for the Left in protecting the rights of minorities, Hungarians in Slovakia and Romanis (Gypsies) in the Czech lands.[19]

The vision that won the support of most Czechs came from the Right. The big winner of Czech politics is the economist Prime Minister, Vaclav Klaus, whose inspiration is F. A. Hayek, not Havel's Heidegger. After one semester in the University of Naples and one semester at Cornell in the 1960s, Klaus converted to neo-classical economics. Following "normalization," he was demoted from the Economic Institute to working in the state bank, at times in manual jobs. Following the Velvet Revolution, he was propelled to the position of finance minister. His great political edge was sharpened because he was surrounded by Charter 77 idealists of Havel's variety with visions of existential revolution and politics without politicians. The pragmatist Klaus (who did not sign Charter 77) realized early on that after the defeat of communism Civic Forum would split into separate parties. So he began organizing his own political party, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), which received a third of the vote in the last June 1992 elections. The outcome of the Slovak elections — the victory of Meciar's "Movement for a Democratic Slovakia" — seemed to prevent Klaus from fulfilling his free-market project. Instead of compromising, he opted for a quick separation with Slovakia that gives him a free hand in the Czech Republic and even saves the treasury the money transfers it made to Slovakia at the expense of Czech taxpayers.

Klaus managed to sell the Czech public on a vision of a complete reversal of the communist tradition to the other extreme. In an interview reproduced in this anthology, he makes clear his view that there is no third way, i.e., reformed socialism with a human face. He believes in an indivisible free market with no central planning, restrictions or modifications. Klaus is critical of the West's complacency about free-market principles: ". . . I find myself sometimes having to teach Westerners about what the market really means. They often do not realize that they might need a market revolution in their own countries. You cannot predict the outcome of the market process; you can only set the conditions for a challenging competition. What we want is to establish the rules of a market economy — not to plan its outcome." Klaus set his agenda in 1990: radical rather than partial reforms, balanced budget, cuts in subsidies

19. After the ethnic cleansing of a million Germans from Czechoslovakia in 1946, Romani tribes moved to the empty cities in north-west Bohemia and parts of Prague's third district.

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and public spending, lowering of trade barriers, and privatization of state monopolies.

Klaus' ideals are shared by the Christian-Democrat Vaclav Benda who is now a member of Klaus' coalition. He grounds Klaus's capitalist values in his Christianity: Capitalism and Czech Catholic Ethics, to paraphrase Weber. Benda also mentions F. A. Hayek as one of his mentors, and adds Eric Voegelin, G. K. Chesterton who, with Belloc, opposed the agnostic socialism of the Bloomsbury circle in favor of a merry England of "Beef and Beer," and Michael Novak of the American Enterprise Institute. In his article, the Slovak Christian-Democrat Carnogursky expresses similar values. However, with 9% of the vote, the Slovak Christian-Democrats are hardly in a position to influence the fate of their state. In his January 1, 1993 speech, Klaus reiterated his vision: reduction in taxes and state intervention in the economy, free-floating prices, increased privatization, minimal welfare services, and the opening of borders for free trade. Although he has had a popular mandate to fulfill his vision, only now, without the Slovaks and with a significantly weakened Havel, can he try and rebuild the Czech Republic as more capitalist than the West.

Two problems are likely to threaten Klaus' vision. First, the main trading partners of a modern capitalist Czech Republic are West European countries. Yet, so far, the unified West European market has consistently protected itself from East and Central European competition in food, textile, metals etc. Now, since the modestly priced Czech goods (in accordance with Czech labor costs) are barred from the West, the West comes to the Czech Republic. Prague has a record number of tourists and resident foreigners from the four corners of the globe, attracted by the low cost of living, the beauty and freedom of the city. Free market and trade, and the development of economic specialization in fields of comparative advantage in the Czech Republic are dependent on Czech integration in the unified European market. Second, the Czech public has only a dim vision of life in the free market. It believes it is the opposite of life under communism and that it is supposed to make everyone rich. If Havel attempted to have politics without politicians, Klaus may try capitalism without capitalists. There are no Czech tycoons, and forty years of command economy were not conductive for the creation of an enterprising class. To be sure, there are many new small businesses springing up. But will there be enough enterprise developing before the Czech Republic becomes a German colony? On paper, the Czech Republic enjoys favorable statistics: the lowest unemployment rate in Europe (2.5%), the lowest inflation and highest standard of living in the former Soviet bloc, and a balanced budget without considerable foreign debt, as in Poland. Klaus' political survival will depend on his ability to translate these figures into economic prosperity without making the necessary changes in rationalizing the Czech market (increase in unemployment, rise in prices, reductions in welfare) too painful for the Czech public.

Prediction is a risky business. The contributors to Whipple's anthology, who accurately represent the first generation of Czechoslovak politicians, failed

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to foresee the rise of nationalism in Slovakia. A Slovak "sociological forecaster" and member of Public against Violence, Fedor Gál, predicted in his April 1990 piece that Czechoslovakia will achieve an Austrian standard of living within 5-7 years after the revolution, and that "It's absurd to think that a small, angry nation like Slovakia has any prospects whatsoever, when Slovaks hate Hungarians, Hungarians hate Slovaks, and everyone hates the Gypsies; when Catholics hate Jews, and Jews hate them back; when thirteen political parties are fighting each other, and so on. . . This is really no platform for entering Europe. On the other hand, you have to admit that we've always had these problems, only we never knew about them. They were drowned in stagnant water. Social life is reemerging, with all its negative aspects as well. I'd very much like to be able to label these separatists 'fringe extremists'."

So much for forecasting sociology. For now it seems that the Czech Republic is going to the Right, while Slovakia is going down the tube. It is even harder to guess what an anthology of Czech and Slovak political thought will look like three years from now.

Aviezer Tucker

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The Price of Velvet: On Thomas Masaryk and Vaclav Havel

Vaclav Havel, *Summer Meditations on Politics, Morality and Civility in a Time of Transition*, trans. by Paul Wilson (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 149 pp.

Both Masaryk and Havel are "President-Liberators," who helped bring about the transition from a repudiated regime to a more legitimate one. Masaryk found this title being formally attributed to him. It is unlikely this precedent will be followed in the case of Havel. Both were/are intellectuals deeply concerned with the moral basis of politics and, in particular, the moral basis of their own participatory politics. In the days preceding victory, both had been part of a small minority in opposition to the regime they eventually replaced. Havel opposed a regime which was vile even by the exacting standards of "really existing socialism." Masaryk, by contrast, opposed a regime he came to reject only *very* late in life, under exceptional circumstances and after prolonged inner hesitation. Havel's great moral achievement was to defy the Communist regime and to show that someone had the moral fiber to do so. Masaryk's achievement, prior to this fateful decision early in WWI, was not to defy the regime — he was an active participant in it as a Member of Parliament and in other ways — but to fight unpopular causes which often infuriated his compatriots more than the regime. He supported the unmasking of fraudulent manuscripts intended to demonstrate Czech medieval glories and took a firm stand in a ritual murder accusation against a Jew, notwithstanding the fact that, deep down, as he later confessed to Karel Capek, he never overcame instinctive negative reactions to Jews. To infuriate both the national vainglory and the anti-Semitism of his co-nationals was a strange path to notoriety for a man who finally made his mark on the world scene as a great nationalist leader. But there is logic in this paradox: his nationalism was only justified, as he came to explain in his writings, because the implementation of its program was at the same time the implementation of an inherently moral historical plan.

In each case (and this is significant) the transition from the repudiated *ancièn regime* to the more democratic new order had a *velvet* quality. The complicity in the course of transition with the previous, disavowed regime has profound implications for the nature of the moral problems faced by the respective Master of Ceremonies, so to speak, of each of the transitions. This is especially true in Havel's case.

The original establishment of the Czechoslovak state in Prague on October

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28th, 1918, had a profound meaning for Masaryk, which he expounded in many of his writings. It terminated the links between the Czech nation and the Habsburg dynasty, which in turn stood for theocratic absolutism and the Counter-Reformation. Political absolutism, Masaryk was to say contemptuously, derived from Church absolutism: "the theory of the monarch's and state absolutism is nothing but kibitzing of the theoreticians of clerical absolutism and dictatorship."[1] The absolutists of the state, while eager to liberate themselves from Church tutelage, were at the same time most eager to inherit some of its infallibility. In this work he also stressed how the infallibility of Bolshevism and that of the Counter-Reformation led, by an identical path, to the Inquisition. His early rejection of Leninism (in this he resembled Russell) was based on the fact that he saw its appalling proclivity to infallibility doctrines and feelings — precisely those traits he rejected (even in their attenuated, age-softened form) in the regime he eventually overturned. It should be added that Masaryk's appreciation of Bolshevik realities was based on an intimate, deeply affectionate but perceptive knowledge of Russia. The main point is the *meaning* of the first Czech revolution of this century for its acknowledged leader (who was, after all, a professional philosopher and a professor). What did it mean to him? Why did it fit in with the wider meaning of history?

For Masaryk it clearly has a double meaning, though the two are related and confirm each other. On the one hand, the establishment of the Czech state is not an isolated event: there is absolutely nothing of the Sinn Fein, of "ourselves alone," of a proud national self-sufficiency about Masaryk's thought; there is no question of going it alone, either ideologically or in political action. Quite the contrary: the Czech revolution is both vindicated and made feasible by the fact that it is part of and even even examplary of a much wider and global process — a replacement of theocracy and absolutism by democracy, which also meant the independence or self-determination of nations. There is not the slightest defiant affirmation of the will of one nation: national independence is both validated and made possible by being part of a much wider and *deeply moral* process. There is a kind of other-directedness about Masaryk's thought, characteristic of the modern Czech spirit which inspired both Masaryk's philosophy and his political strategy. The political aim had to be vindicated as a corollary of the overall historical trend. The strategy consisted above all in doing things which would persuade the leaders of world opinion that Czechs were worthy members of the international community. He was inclined to confuse the acceptance of the Czechs by History with their acceptance by the Great and the Good in the West. Consequently, he confused national policy with national image and propaganda; and encouraged, unwittingly, the illusion that if this enterprise wassuccessful the nation would be safe. To believe all this was to overrate the dedication to the democratic direction of history amongst Western leaders. No wonder that Munich was a trauma for the nation

1. See his *Svetova Revoluce* (Prague: 1925), p. 573.

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which became, to a considerable extent, Masaryk's reverent disciple.

A great deal depends on whether Masaryk correctly understood that wider process of history. Some of his compatriots, early and late, had their doubts, and the debate concerning Masaryk's reading of history is one of the most interesting themes in Czech intellectual life. Incidentally, Masaryk's book was in due course translated into English as *The Making of a State*, whereas the Czech title means *World Revolution*. The English version can be justified on the grounds that it gives the reader a more accurate account of the actual contents of the book, which is a fascinating description of Masaryk's activities and thoughts during WWI that eventually led to the establishment of the Republic. In a deeper sense, however, it is an appalling mis-translation: the Czechs were not creating their own state out of some capricious willfulness. On Masaryk's account, they were doing it because this was part of an overall global and deeply moral trend. Masaryk wanted it clearly understood that he would not be seen indulging in state-creation, unless it was manifest that it was morally right to do so and history had decreed it should be done. These two conditions were linked, for history did not do things lightly or without good cause. Like the men who drafted the American Declaration of Independence, he was not going to indulge in state-creation lightly, without due cause and deep philosophical reflection. No State Formation without Philosophic Justification! The victory of their nationalism was the victory of democracy, reason, sobriety, skepticism, individualism.

But, and this is the second theme in Masaryk's interpretation of the great transformation, the Czechs were not merely jumping on a bandwagon, belatedly and without having made much of a contribution to it. They had once, in the late Middle Ages and early modern times, been at the forefront of that movement which they were now re-joining: *that* was the deep meaning of Czech history. The early 15th century Czech Hussite proto-Reformation was crucial. It was followed by the radical social practice of the Taborites ("Tabor is our program" was one of Masaryk's mottoes), by Jan Zizka's militarily brilliant defence of this movement in defiance of papal and imperial forces; and, later, by the elective monarchy of George of Podebrady, with his historically premature scheme for international peace and security. All this showed that the Czechs were not passive beneficiaries but distinguished contributors to that movement which had at long last prevailed in 1918 and which, among other things, established the Czechoslovak state.

The Czechs had been deprived of this distinguished and pioneering role in the world trend towards democracy by the outcome of the battle of the White Mountain, but the whole meaning of Masaryk's revolution was precisely the reversal, after three hundred years, of the outcome of that battle. Otto von Bismarck was someone else who once spent an entire night pondering on "what if" the battle of the White Mountain (which in 1620 decided the victory of the Counter-Reformation in the Czech lands, and for 300 years excluded the Czechs from the political map of Europe) had only gone the other way: Czech Bohemia would have remained Protestant, it would have aligned itself

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with Protestant Prussia, Austria would have remained insignificant and Protestant Bohemia would have helped Prussia dominate the Danube valley and open the way to Bagdad. Masaryk's opponents, as he himself mentioned,[2] invoked Bismarck's one-night reverie in justification of their Catholicism and Austrophilia: what good luck that we *did* lose on the White Mountain, for otherwise the Prussians would have Germanized us while using us as their Protestant allies. This is of course the Austro-Slavism argument, clearly articulated in 1848 and vindicated in the age of Adolf and Josef: without something like a Habsburg Danubian Empire we (and other small nations of Central and South East Europe) are caught between German expansionism and Russian autocracy. Masaryk himself was worried by the latter, and not insensitive to the force of this argument throughout his earlier years.

For Masaryk, the momentous events of October 1918 in due course became, all at once, the fulfillment of history's deepest design and a long-delayed correction of the 300-year-old distortion of the history of his own nation. All this being so, one would expect at least a little drama and blood, especially in view of the fact that some of those who had striven for the moral trend of history had been executed for high treason against the Habsburg Monarchy. Not a bit of it. Though the phrase had not yet become current, the revolution and transfer of power of 1918 already had a velvet quality. Masaryk stresses the calm, bloodless character of this *coup d'etat* (*prevrat*). distinguishes it from a revolution, and notes it only happened after a revolution in Vienna and after the collapse of the Austrian front in Italy. Everything was done by negotiation, not by violence. It took a fortnight to complete the process: technical problems, Masaryk observes, made it impossible to proceed faster. The new authorities were first of all recognized by the old ones as *jointly* competent and co-responsible (something to be repeated in the second historic vindication of democracy by Havel, against a much nastier autocracy). It was surely no accident, Masaryk observes, that the new authorities first took over the Supply Ministry, thereby ensuring for themselves the control of the military. He notes that otherwise the military constituted a grave danger to the newly proclaimed political order. With supplies well under control, they could be brought to heel.[3]

In Havel's case, the transition was similarly courteous and technical. He had helped overturn an exceptionally nasty totalitarian regime (none of this could be said of the order displaced by Masaryk), but it all seemed to be a matter of request and agreement: ". . . even the Communist president resigned at our request (*sic*)," he notes with pleasure and a touch of surprise. The revolution did proceed in the idiom of requests and resignations. Once upon a time, Czechs used to throw foreign agents out of the window of Prague Castle: the first time, on to pikes, the second time, onto a soft dungheap; but the third time a polite request for resignation is graciously accepted and an Assistant

2. *Ibid.* p. 595.
3. *Ibid.* p. 475.

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Satrap becomes the new Prime Minister. It is all part of a tradition.

The interesting thing is that in this century Prague Castle has experienced virtually the entire gamut of possible regimes: Habsburg Counter-Reformation traditionalism, Masarykian liberalism, Hitler, a short interregnum, Stalinism, and now Havel. But each time the outgoing powerholders negotiated, haggled a bid if they could, and *signed*. President Hacha signed to Hitler, General Toussaint, commander of the German garrison in 1945, negotiated his retreat with the Czech National Committee. Even K.H. Frank, the last *Reichs-Protektor*, finding that the Czech negotiators disliked addressing him and preferred the German soldiers, politely resigned so as to aid the negotiations. (This, however, did not save him from being publicly hanged in Prague a year later). Benes handed over to the Communists, Dubcek signed to Brezhnev, and Masaryk and Havel both recall in detail how they indulged in political maneuvers. Havel, for instance, tells us with pride (p. 23) how even the dropping of the term "socialist" from the official designation of the country, which in other ex-Communist countries was "dealt with. . . in an hour" in Prague was carried out with parliamentary propriety. (All this procedural fastidiousness did not always prevent a fair amount of murder taking place after some negotiated transfers of power, such as in May 1945 and after February 1948). This is not necessarily a bad thing. Why should changes always be hallowed by blood, why should not the partnership of past and present also reach across revolutions? And maintain the rules of courtesy? On occasion, also raise moral problems? It was not quite the same problem for Masaryk. as it is for Havel, but it is interesting to see how they face their respective dilemmas.

Masaryk's problem was that he had to explain why the Habsburg Empire, he had supported for so long had to be destroyed. It could not have been so evil, if it had been endorsed for so long. Many feel nostalgia for it now: better Franz Josef than Josef! Masaryk himself conceded that ". . . after all, we had, almost all of us, for so long maintained and defended the necessity of the Austrian Empire to the whole world!"[4] So what had changed now? The Habsburg Empire had failed to improve itself, he would say, and so the confrontation of WWI had to be seen as the struggle between democratic good and authoritarian evil. As one of his most eloquent and ambivalent critics, Vaclav Cerny observes that this led him into one or two contradictions.[5] One arose from the somewhat strange inclusion of the Tzars in the camp of liberal democracy. The other was far more serious: the overrating of the allegedly unambiguous, and it would seem definitively victorious democratic revolution — the "World Revolution" which gave his book its original Czech title.

This belatedly acquired conviction led to the implicit but deeply pervasive syllogism, which imbued education in the Republic Masaryk set up. The West

4. *Ibid.*, p. 449.

5. Vaclav Cerny, in Milic Capek and Karel Hruby, eds., *T. G. Masaryk in Perspective. Comments and Criticism* (Ann Arbor, MI: SVU Press, 1981), p. 106.

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is democratic, the West is strong, it is democratic because it is strong, and strong because democratic, and because this is the way world history is going. We [the Czechs] had been in on this splendid movement sooner than most. As early as the 15th century, we had been unjustly deprived of our birthright, but now we are safely back where we belong, and so we are indeed safe, for the democratic West is very powerful, and all is well with the world. I [Masaryk] have had my primary education, and two and a half years of secondary education, in Prague schools, and I can only say that this message emanated, unambiguously and confidently, from the portraits of the President-Liberator which adorned every school room. Major premise: world history is our guide and guarantor. Minor premise: world history has chosen democracy and the West as its agents, therefore they are irresistible and their allies (notably ourselves) are safe.

Now what happens to people who internalize the entire syllogism, notably its major premise, but who are suddenly confronted with a traumatic demonstration of the falsity of the minor premise? This is what happened to the Czechs in 1938 and 1940. Munich demonstrated that the West was neither firm nor loyal to its democratic acolytes. As Thurber might have said, there is safety neither in numbers nor in democracy nor in anything else. The humiliatingly quick and easy defeat of the French army in 1940, previously vaunted as the best in Europe, concluded the lesson. But what if the premise continues to be persuasive, and the historical trend is still authoritative? A new minor premise is now available: history appears to be endorsing a new force in the East, capable of defeating the Germans who had defeated the French . . . The expulsion of three million Germans, fear of German revenge (a fear very vivid after 1945), and recollection of Munich, all jointly propelled any waverers to the same conclusion: there can be no thought of resisting Stalin.

I do not wish to caricature Masaryk. There can be no question of his endorsing democracy simply because he believed it to be strong and victorious. He valued it for quite independent and moral reasons, but he also believed it to be vindicated by manifest historical destiny. And here the trouble is not merely that the verdict of history is not quite so unambiguous, as his critics insist (Patocka, Cerny), but, more seriously, the syllogism which he prepared. and the educational system set up under his authority inculcated, led inevitably — given the replacement of the falsified minor premise by what then seemed to be the historically correct one — to the passive acceptance of 1948.

The truth is both ironic and bitter, but inescapable: Masaryk's philosophy of history eventually led to 1948. Nothing could be further from his wishes, but the iron laws of logic lead to this conclusion. If it is *World Revolution* which provides the signal for the correct political direction in Prague, but if (in light of further events) Western democracy turns out to be a feeble, disloyal and ineffective agent of that great revolutionary trend, and a more powerful and steady herald appears in the East . . . the conclusion is clear. Those who carried out and those who accepted the 1948 Communist coup were acting in harmony with the syllogism Masaryk had taught them: they continued to respect the

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major premise affirming the authority of World History, while merely replacing the minor premise discredited in Munich by a new one concerning what now seemed the dominant thrust of history.

Havel's problem, and his solution, are rather different. Unlike Masaryk, Havel does not confront the awkward question of why he turned against a system he had accepted and endorsed for so long and within which he had worked comfortably. Masaryk openly reports how, early on during WWI, he went to see the Habsburg Viceroy in Prague. This was a man alleged to have in his possession a list of people due for eventual arrest, including Masaryk. "[He] was a decent man, and it was possible to talk with him fairly openly . . ." How cosy, how *gemütlich* personal-political relations were in those days! No, Havel does not face this problem, the system he opposed was unambiguously repulsive and Havel had always opposed it at considerable cost to himself.

Havel's problem is not why he turned so late against a system previously held tolerable and reformable but, rather, since that system had been overturned, why so much of its heritage was tolerated. Why so much velvet? Why try to reassure the old apparat by choosing one of their number for the first free Prime Minister? Why so much concern with the technical continuity of government? This may have been justifiable in 1918: the *ancièn regime* had the legitimacy of genuine antiquity and no horrifying crimes against community on its conscience, whereas the communist one had been guilty of forty years of sustained mendacity, murder, blackmail of its own citizens through educational persecution of children, high treason and collaboration with a foreign occupation. There are good reason being soft on collaborators with totalitarianism, and for leaving them with their gains: it is better that they should go and enrich themselves further, rather than smuggle their money abroad, and it is better that they should try to save themselves by conversion to the market, investing in capitalism the funds stolen under communism, than by turning to chauvinism. (One reason for the inevitability of the Czech-Slovak split is that the Czech apparat seems to have chosen the former option, the Slovak the latter, and the two strategies will not mix.) Also, there are too many who in one way or another were compromised with the previous regime, too many borderline cases, too many factual ambiguities. There is a plausible theory which maintains that right-wing dictatorships can be liberalized far more easily than left-wing ones, because old powerholders can be offered the retention of their wealth as their reward for surrendering power, whereas in Left totalitarianism there is *only* power and no wealth (in the technical sense) available for retention. The Czech Velvet Revolution seems to provide a counter-example to this: ill-gotten gains, and insider information are used by the old apparat to turn themselves into the *nouveaux riches*. It may be good for the economy, but it does leave a bad taste in the mouths of many, including Havel himself.

Havel's own most strongly expressed complaint concerns the moral decline. ". . . society has freed itself, but in some ways behaves worse than when it was in chains" (p. 2). Did *society* free itself? On the very next page, Havel

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himself remembers that "a handful of friends and I were able to bang our heads against the wall for years by speaking the truth about communist totalitarianism while surrounded by an ocean of apathy." This society had accepted the communist regime — without enthusiasm but resignation — to such an extent that when liberation came from outer space those liberated could not believe their luck and kept looking over their shoulders nervously for some new set of tanks to arrive to put a stop to it all, though this time there was no place from which those tanks could come. There is a blatant contradiction between crediting the victory to his society and also castigating it for apathy. Two pages later, once again he claims victory, not this time for society at large but for his own moralistic style: "Communism was overthrown by life, by thought, by human dignity" (p. 5). Was it? Masaryk defended his ultimate political option by a philosophy of history which is interesting, stimulating, contentious, and which turned sour and fatal for the nation politically reestablished in its name. It deserves discussion. Havel's political philosophy — uncompromising decency in the face of sleazy, cynical, opportunist and unscrupulous dictatorship — is heroic and admirable. When, however, it is presented as a *theory* of how such dictatorships can be overcome, or when he goes as far as to say that this was the *only* way to do it (p. 5), it becomes absurd, indefensible, and can easily be refuted from evidence he himself provides. Two senses can be attributed to Havel's motto *Living in Truth:* it can mean (1) not allowing oneself to be bullied into affirming falsehood by a vicious regime; and (2) not allowing oneself to indulge in high-minded illusions because they make one feel good. Havel's record under (1) is superb. But it would not be altogether easy to give him a clean bill of health under (2).

This contradiction in Havel's thought is taken to task, for instance, by one Petr Fidelius (a pen-name assumed in the days of clandestine activity, but which the author chooses to continue to use) in *Literarni Noviny*, a Prague literary weekly, of June 6, 1992. Either communism was destroyed by something other than our society, says the author, or our society cannot be as rotten as Havel complains. Fidelius inclines to the latter alternative. But the first option seems to be endorsed from a surprising source: Petr Pithart, Prime Minister of the Czech lands after the Velvet Revolution, who begins by noting that he had only used this expression in quotation marks: what he means is not that it failed to be velvety, but that there was no revolution. With brutal candor, he says that he refuses to use the term revolution, that there had been no conflict, that the decomposing communist power had only lasted as long as it did because "*we*" had tolerated it, that among comparable communist societies we had been the last, and arrived ten minutes after midnight. He proceeds to excoriate post-velvet authorities (including himself) for culpable light-heartedness and benevolence, notably in being soft on the old power-holders in the Ministry of the Interior.[6] Pithart is an erstwhile dissident, earlier a communist, who wrote in *samizdat* and abroad under the pen-name Sladecek a remarkable analysis of Czech history and of communist guilt (in which he shared) called

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simply *'68*. He clearly has a penchant for *mea culpa* self-analysis.

Of the three positions, Havel's, Fidelius', and Pithart's, it is the third which seems correct. Communism was not destroyed by society or by honesty. It could dominate the former and contain or corrupt the latter. It was destroyed by consumerism and Western militarism, plus an outburst of decency and naiveté in the Kremlin. Faced by a double defeat both in consumption and in the arms races, Soviet leaders chose to liberalize politically, in the simple-minded and quickly refuted expectation that this would rapidly lead to an economic improvement. To their credit, a measure of liberalization was to their taste, while economic liberalization went against the social grain. Consequently, Eastern Europe, some of which was supine and some of which would have settled for far less liberty than fell from heaven, is free.

So Masaryk's and Havel's moralisms are not the same, and they do not face the same problem. Masaryk was a bit of a Puritan. as well as a moralist. He does not merely see the link between Counter-Reformation and Marxist infallibilism; he also dislikes Catholicism for its transcendentalism, which by reaction drives its acolytes into that sexual mysticism so conspicuously present in modernist literature. It is Catholics, not Protestants, who are susceptible to it. This led Masaryk into difficulty in the case of D.H. Lawrence, whom he was obliged to declare an exception.

Both Masaryk and Havel are open to the accusation that they take too seriously the Czech national motto, *Truth Prevails*. It cannot be relied on to prevail, even in the long run, and as Keynes said, in the long run we are all dead. Masaryk used as his background premise a view of the dominant position of democracy in contemporary history — a view which let down those who accepted it in the days of Hitler and Stalin. To do him justice, Masaryk only seemed to embrace this view wholeheartedly when he needed to justify his choice in WWI: previously he struggled on two fronts, defending social realism against the more extreme romantic historicists. Havel, a superb playwright but an amateur social theorist, puts his trust not in historical theory but in the eventual victory of simple decency. Inasfaras he is saying that decency should be maintained come what may, one can only admire him. When he says that this is politically effective and that there is no other way, one must part company with him.

What prevailed in 1989 was consumerism and the all-European endorsement of a system which satisfies its imperatives, as against one which conspicuously fails to do so and, in addition, is also oppressive and sleazy. Democracy and decency obtained a free ride on the back of consumerism, and we must be deeply grateful for that. But it is dangerous to delude oneself and suppose that they owed the victory to their inherent political appeal. We must, of course, admire those who bravely stood up for decency: this is why both Masaryk and Havel deserve admiration. But it does not mean we must also accept their theories

6. The paper quoting these remarks, *Necensurovane Noviny*, No. 12, 1992, a fortnightly, does so with an ironic *No Comment*, as if to say — look who's talking . . .

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concerning why victory was guaranteed. Real loyalty to Masaryk lies in respecting truth, however unpalatable, not his specific views on history.

The two men differ considerably in what they have to offer. Masaryk's theory is worked out with academic craftsmanship; it is also contentious, and did, ironically, lead the nation in a direction he would have abhorred. Havel's theory is one he only affirms when he formulates his Credo, but which turns out to be mistaken when he describes what actually happened or when, in his splendid plays, he lays bare the mechanics of how it happened. Communism was not overthrown by life, by thought, by human dignity, as he affirms. In his realistic moments, in his literary and descriptive work, Havel knows better. There he describes, with superb irony, precisely how it is that truth does *not* prevail. The society Havel knows and analyses so well, and now also excoriates, accepted communism without enthusiasm but with a resignation so great that it literally could not believe its luck when extraneous forces terminated the horror. It took months to convince many people that liberation was for real. Masaryk's concept of democracy was somewhat Protestant and Puritan, and he would have been embarrassed by some of the allies it acquired in its second coming (a permissive pop culture and the Counter-Reformation Church). He probably would have shared some of Havel's disillusion and deplored some aspects of the contemporary scene less unacceptable to Havel.

Still, there is a link between the two men. Havel is enough of a child of Masaryk's Republic to recognize explicitly the principle honored by the first Czechoslovak state, that only *professors* are fit to be heads of state. When he comes to dream aloud and paint the idyll of the Czechoslovakia he is trying to build he says in so many words: "At the head of the state will be a grey-haired professor . . . with . . . charm . . ." (p. 102ff.). This is the Masarykian model of the presidency. The First Republic only had professorial presidents: non-professors, let alone non-academics need not apply. Had the timing of the collapse of Marxism been different, Prague would no doubt have had a President-Professor in Jan Patocka, and tradition would have been maintained. But times have changed, or no professor with an appropriate record was available.

So the professor offered us an overall theory of what is happening and should happen, while the playwright brilliantly described how what really does happen is manipulated into being, while also saying something different in his declarations of faith. Perhaps we need a combination of the two. It will be interesting to see whether professors or playwrights make better presidents.

Ernest Gellner

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